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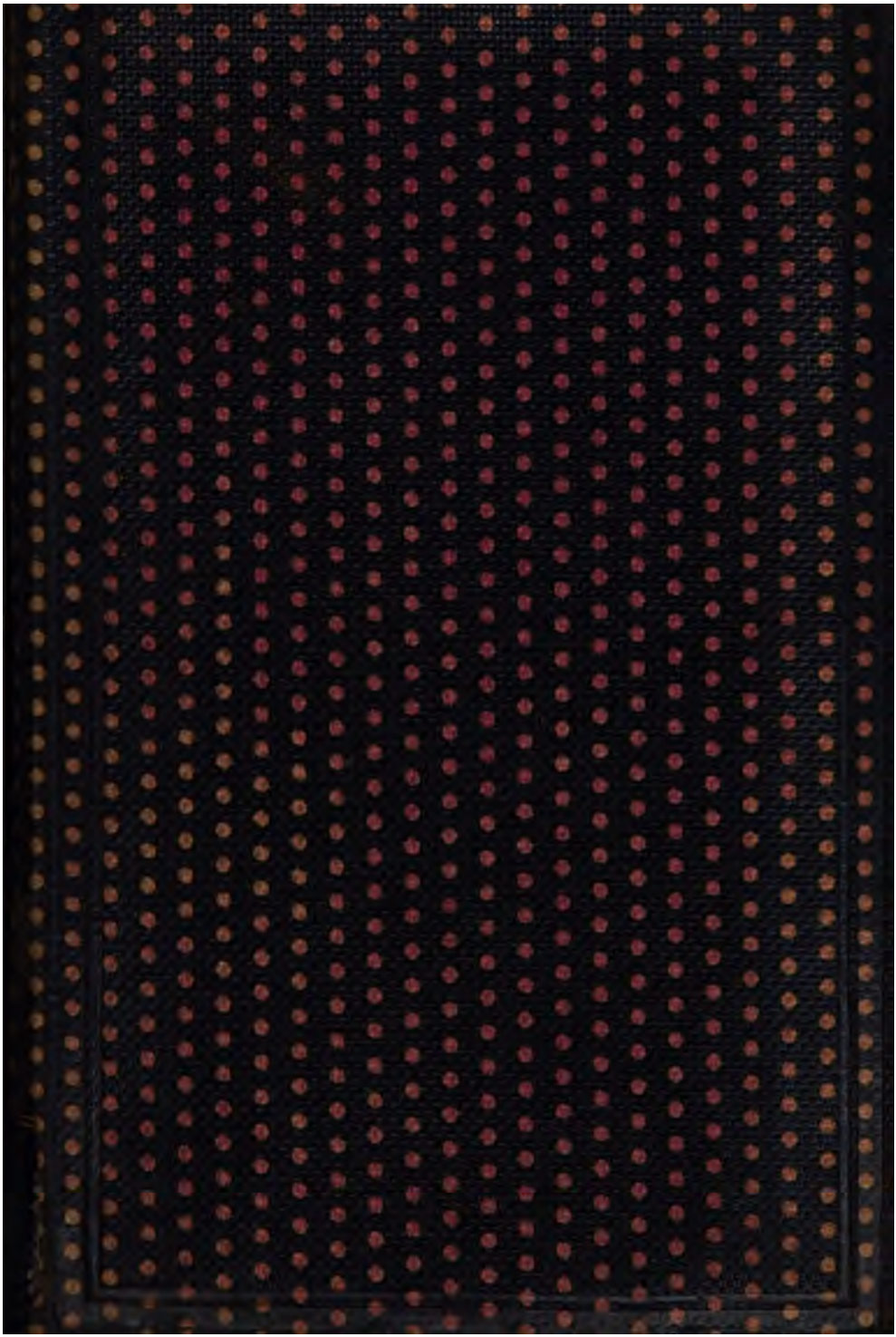

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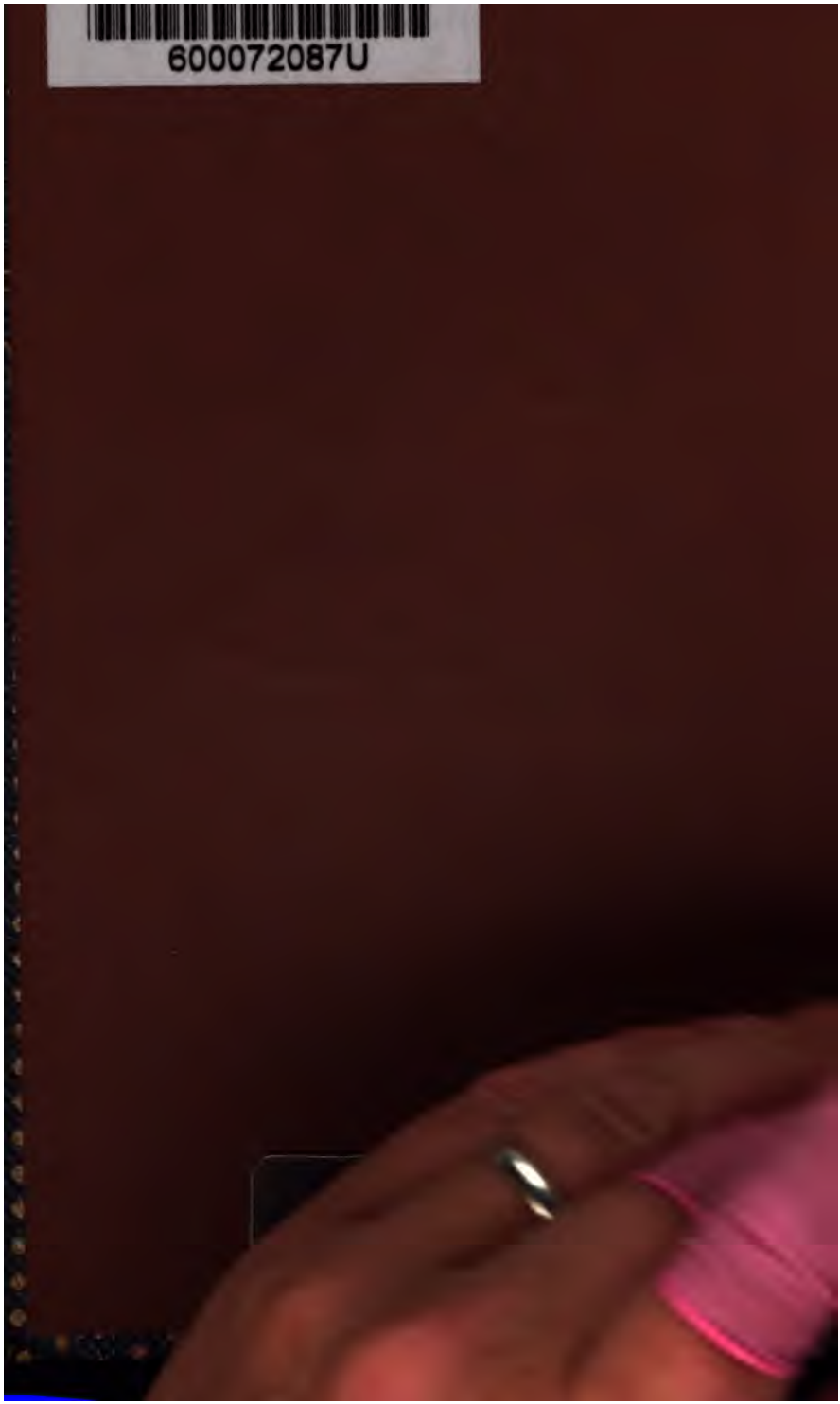

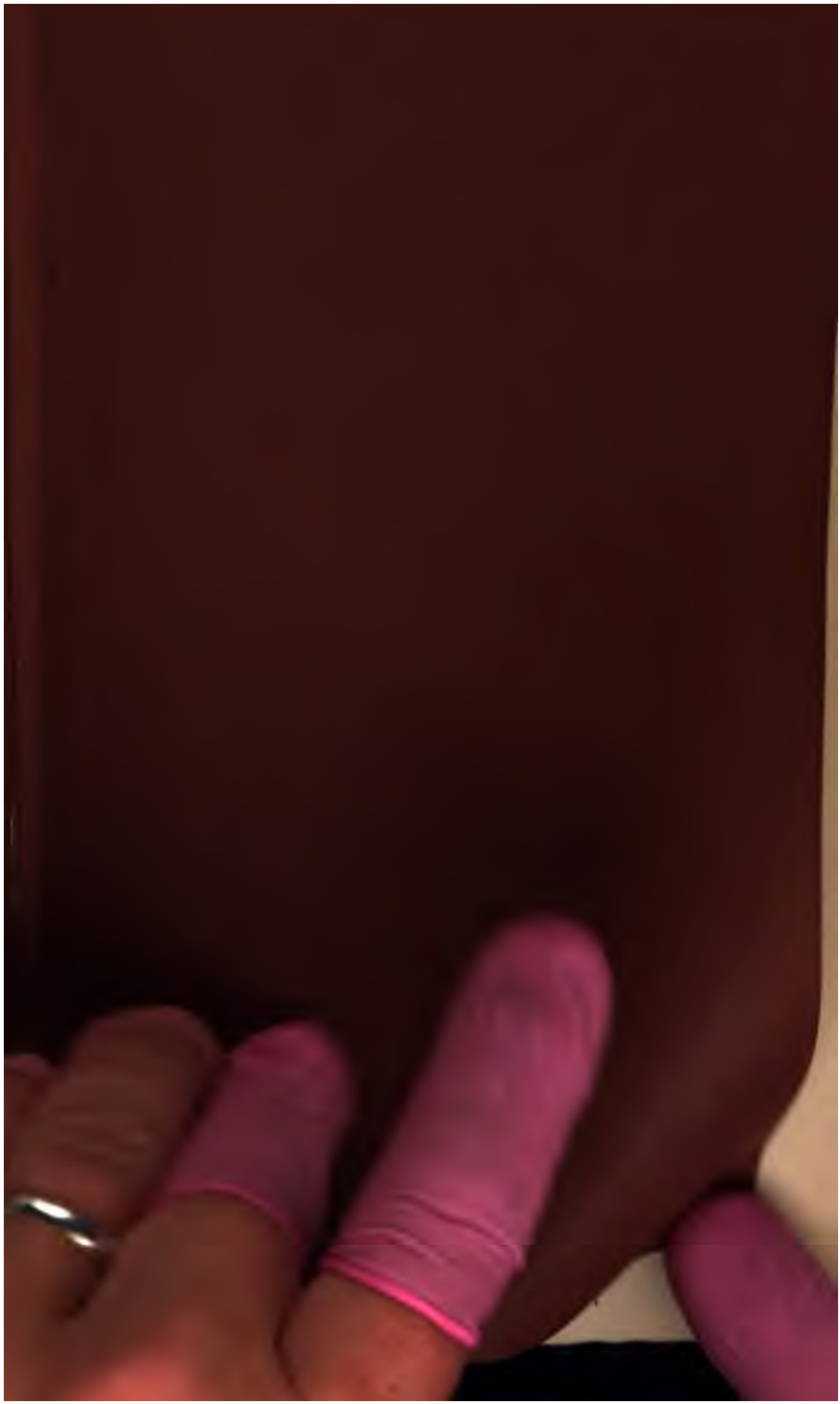

THE

MORNING OF LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"GORDON OF DUNCAIRN."

"Yet we are able only to survey
Dawnings of beams, and promises of day."—PRIOR.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE

MORNING OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

"I have always observed the thread of life to be like other threads and skeins of silk, full of snarles and encumbrances."

GEORGE HERBERT.

I HAVE lingered more than I intended on this first portion of my life; the incidents, slight as they seem, are so indelibly engraven on my memory, and with their recollection such a flood of dear associations has been borne in upon my mind, that it has made me feel unwilling to leave the comparatively sunny plain, and plunge into the more gloomy vallies of my history.

Soon after the party at the Grange, Miss Annesley and Edith left our neighbourhood to make their annual visit to Calvers, before the season became too far advanced, and from thence

they were to go to their usual winter quarters at Penzance.

There was little then to disturb our very quiet life at Arden Rise. It might be the unwonted gaiety of the past summer that unfitted Amy for a return to the old manner of life; or it might be that circumstances had contributed to make her even less companionable than before; from whatever cause, there was a restlessness about her which was very distressing to see. But as there was at the same time more than common asperity in her answers and manner, whenever I made any allusion to the subject, I gradually ceased to speak of it, and hoped that, by degrees, all would subside into its ordinary course.

For my own part, I threw myself into study more than ever, sometimes I resumed my old seat in the deep Oriel window of the now deserted Grange library, but more often I pursued studies that carried me out into the open air. The garden occupied my attention as much as when it had been only a stolen pleasure in Miss Fleming's time, but my chief resort was the sea-shore; there seemed to be an affinity between my own feelings and the ever restless sea; it was like sympathy, and I felt my own heart calmed and subdued as by a stronger spirit. Many an hour

used I to spend among the tide-pools of the little-rocks too, in search of new specimens of sea-weed, or marine curiosities, or in exploring the crevices and various spots well known to me for shells. Old Adam took great interest in my pursuits, and would often go out dredging, bringing me home loads of treasures, the display of which, I believe, gave him him quite as much gratification as myself.

Poor old Molly's rheumatism began to make itself felt again as the season advanced, but it was wonderful what a store of comforts, she used with pride to shew me, had been provided for her by "Miss Edith, bless her sweet heart," as were always the concluding words of the exhibition. The sight of these things, indeed, never failed to bring to my mind our conversation in the bower-room, and I could not help thinking the blessings ought to have been invoked on another heart. I trusted, however, that the benediction asked for her, behind whose name his own kind deeds were veiled, would fall eventually in some way upon himself; at least it would probably be shared by both—though there was always a little sting at the end of that thought.

Towards the close of October, I received a letter from Lady Ruth Aubrey, inviting me to Alver-

stoke Park. Clarence was coming too, she said, and would meet me at Winterford, and be my escort up. My father acquiesced in the plan, and Amy entered into it with her whole heart. I quite blamed myself for ever having accused her of indifference, when I saw the interest she took in seeing that I was provided with every thing that I could require; how unselfishly she laughed away all my doubts as to whether I ought to accept the pleasure and leave her so lonely; how she reminded me that we had always been too independant of each other to allow of her feeling solitude irksome; and playfully rebuked my vanity in supposing my society necessary to her happiness.

It certainly did seem a great undertaking for me to make a visit all alone; it was the first time I had taken so decided a step, and my mind was full of misgivings, till the familiar face of Clarence as he joined me at the Winterford Station, in some degree reassured me; and when we arrived at our journey's end, undemonstrative as Lady Ruth's manner was, there was in it a gentle kindness which soon made me feel quite at home, and my shyness was fairly conquered.

One thing gave me some uneasiness; it was Clarence's conduct, and the undisguised interest

he expressed, and clearly felt about Edith. He had not seen her since we were all together at Brackenhurst, and during the journey he was always trying to bring the conversation round to the Grange; when I ventured, in a half laughing way, to tell him he had no business to think so much of Edith Marsh, he first of all broke out into an eulogium of her perfections, asking how it was possible for any one to see such a little houri, and notice all her engaging ways, and not feel a strong interest in her? more especially if it were really true that she was to marry Mr. Annesley; it did seem such a melancholy fate for a brilliant thing like Edith. And when I rather resented the idea of a life spent with such an one as Mr. Annesley being a melancholy fate, he laughed and apologized for treading too heavily on ground that he knew, or ought to know was tender with me; but he sometimes doubted whether Mr Annesley, with all his nobility and refinement, was not just the least in the world—not exactly interested perhaps—don't be angry, Mabel—but alive to the fact that the Calvers property would furnish the Grange, and reinstate it very nicely.

"Of course, I don't doubt his pride in the possession of it as it is; but still you know, Mabel,

human nature is frail, and sometimes ambitious, and ambition is a noble passion, no doubt, and Mr. Annesley is but a man after all."

I laughed, and told him to take care what he was about, seeing that the future Earl of Ottersee would be but a poor man without the purse of his wealthy cousin. And that kept him quiet for nearly the whole distance from one station to another, during which interval he vented his feelings, whatever they might be, in a series of heavy sighs and low whistlings; but then he returned to the subject again. "Of course Mr. Annesley could not be blamed for marrying an heiress, who seemed to have fallen into his arms in that strange way, any more than a man could be blamed for eating a plum that dropped into his mouth when he was lying under the tree; but was there any love in the case on either side? Were they the least suited to each other? and would she be happy with a man whose mental proportions would always keep the delicate little neck of that tender mind so painfully and perpetually on the stretch?"

I told him it really need be no affair of his, Edith would not be called upon to decide till she was one and twenty, and even then I was sure she would not be hurried into an engagement, certainly not into a marriage, without her free and full con-

sent; so I thought the best thing he could do, would be to leave off pitying one who really was no great object of compassion, and transfer all his kind interest to Lady Ruth, who had a far greater claim upon it, "and who is, perhaps, at this moment as much open to the commiseration of others," I added, laughing, "as Edith Marsh can be."

It was conversation such as this, interspersed with comments on the country through which we passed; descriptions, on his part, of Alverstoke and the mode of life there; which I returned by giving details of all that had been done and said in our neighbourhood during his absence; and he varied by giving an account of his military duties and amusements, the sayings and doings of "our fellows," the devastion they caused in the hearts of the fair, with sundry achievements of himself and others in hunting, steeple-chasing, astonishing the natives, and other sports and pastimes peculiar to the youth of Britain, that beguiled the journey, and almost made me forget that I was for the first time leaving the paternal nest alone, and going among comparative strangers.

But, indeed, it would have been hardly possible to regret home among those who were so bent

upon making me feel as one of the family. In every way, too, the change was beneficial to me, I was taken out of myself, as it were, by helping Lady Ruth to wait upon and amuse her father. It was delightful to watch her quiet, patient ways with him, how she studied all his whims, and devoted herself to their gratification, and how totally unconscious she seemed to be that either he was selfish and exacting, or she doing anything beyond the most common-place things, when she was kneeling to rub his ankles till nearly ready to faint, or reading till she could hardly speak for hoarseness. At first, as I tried to take her place in any of these employments, or the many duties which he liked her to perform, he would reject my offers, saying that no one could do them so well as Ruth, and he was sure she could not be so soon tired of waiting upon him; but gradually he came to like my way of serving him almost as well as her's, and it was a great relief to her often that I could share her labours. My singing gave him especial pleasure, he was a connoisseur in music, and I exerted all my powers to gratify him, while, at the same time, I myself derived enjoyment from their exercise. The gift of improvisation had not deserted me, though it would not always

come at my call; often, when anything had interested me, during the day, or a visit to some wild, romantic lake scenery, so different from that of my own home, had excited my imagination, I used thus, by the help of music and verse, to describe to him what I had seen, and the sensations that had been aroused.

He was a selfish old man, and sometimes I used to feel very angry with him, but he would express such fond love for his darling Ruth, even at the moment when he was tasking her powers to the utmost stretch, that, in spite of all, I could not but like, or, rather perhaps, pity him; for his whole life had been one of self-indulgence, so that he was incapable of looking at anything or any person without considering how far they could be made to gratify himself; and dear Ruth was so unconscious of heroism on her part, or exigence on his, that it would have been cruel to shew resentment, or in any way open her eyes to the truth of the matter.

Clarence vexed me often; it was in his power to have done much for his cousin, but he was so totally careless. He liked her to ride, or drive, or stroll about with him, he took some interest in her amusements, but he had neither tact nor judgment towards herself. He would want her

to go out with him at times when the Earl was accustomed to have her with him; and when she pleaded this duty, he would call her father a selfish old man, which he knew hurt her more than anything he could have said; and after spending a long time in wheedling, and coaxing, and ridiculing poor Ruth in vain, he would fling away from her in a huff, and unmindful of her pleading looks, call her a conventional bit of ice, and walk off whistling to shew his indifference. I knew when he spoke of her coldness and conventionality, he was thinking of Edith, and drawing comparisons, and it was very clear which would carry the day in his mind—though in my own, I believed that beneath that undemonstrative exterior lay a warm and large heart, while many things had led me to doubt the strength and depth of the humming-bird's feelings, though these were always fluttering and playing upon the surface. However, there might be a reason why my judgment of the latter was less favourable than it might have been; nevertheless, it grieved me to see Clarence's injustice to his cousin. Sometimes the Earl would consent to receive me as Ruth's substitute, and so allow her to comply with Clarence's wishes, but it was not very often that I could induce him to dispense

with the companionship of that fair gentle face.

One day that I walked out alone with Clarence, he told me he wanted to go in the direction of the keeper's house, and as it was of little consequence to me which way I went, I gladly accompanied him thither. I found his object there was to enquire about a dog, a clever little Skye-terrier that the man was training for him.

It was very handsome of its kind, which means that it was perfect in its ugliness; and endowed with a full measure of all the wonderful sagacity and knowingness which that kind of dog so eminently possesses. We amused ourselves for a long time, seeing the various tricks which the little animal had been taught, and then we continued our walk.

"Is it for yourself or Ruth that you are educating that dog, Clarence?" I asked, as we left the house.

"Ruth indeed!" he replied, "what would be the use of such a creature to her? Why his sense would put his mistress to shame every hour of the day."

"His cunning might," I said, "for I allow that Ruth is wholly free from trick or display. Then it is for yourself I suppose?"

"Wrong again, you inquisitive daughter of Eve," he replied with rather a conscious air, "do you think Ruth and I are all the world, Mabel?"

"Not quite," I observed, "though they ought, perhaps, to be so to each other."

"Oh, for the matter of that," he rejoined, with a scornful laugh, "he formed a very small portion of Ruth's world; and, indeed, except that grumbling old uncle of mine," he went on, "it would be difficult to define what does constitute any world to her. No, if you must know, Mingo is intended for a very different mistress."

"Not for Edith Marsh, Clarence, I hope," was my exclamation.

"For no other," he answered carelessly, "Mingo is to call Mr. Annesley's dear little Edith, mistress. Does that vex you, Mabel? I thought somehow I might be doing you a kindness, eh?" and he looked at me with an arch glance.

"I am so obtuse as not to be able to discover the good intended," I replied, with an air of unconsciousness, "but the bad is patent enough to my mind."

"Oh I cry you mercy," he said, rather testily, "I always fancied his most Serene Highness, the descendant of that long race of heroes who contrived to shuffle away all their property, had an

interest in your eyes; and that that rakish little cutter, the Edith, was rather taking the wind out of your sails more than you liked, so that it would be a kindness, or at least there would be no harm in taking out letters of marque to clear the seas of her."

"You are talking great nonsense, or worse, Clarence," I replied, "I want no help from anybody, least of all from you; so if you will accept advice from me, give up your privateering projects and be content to sail under the Queen's colours. Has Ruth seen this dog?"

"I believe not," he answered indifferently, "nor do I wish her to hear of it, or she may covet it for her own possession."

"I will say nothing to Ruth about it," I returned after a minute's silence, "on condition that you promise to abandon the idea of giving it to Edith, Clarence."

He walked on a little way without speaking, at last he said, "Very well, Mabel, I dare say you are right, and after all, who knows? perhaps she would not accept it, or 'Gardie' might interpose his authority, so I promise you that I will not give it to Edith."

There was something in his accent which made me doubt the perfect openness of his intention,

but not being able to gain any more, I was obliged to content myself with a promise which, he argued, I must have a most suspicious mind to doubt the validity of, and so the matter dropped for the present.

But we were not always a divided party; there were times when Ruth was at liberty to enjoy air and exercise with us, and occasionally we made long excursions on horseback. Ruth was a good horsewoman, and I, by no means timid—so equipped in a riding dress of her's I used to accompany the cousins, and in this way they shewed me much of the beautiful lake country in which Alverstoke was situated. It was rather late in the season for seeing the foliage in its greatest perfection, for in October many of the trees were already bare, and the glory of the autumnal tints had mostly passed away; but there was quite enough beauty left to enable imagination to supply easily all that was wanting, while what the woods had lost, the waters had gained; and those picturesque falls, many of which are mere threads in summer, now poured down a body of water that, to my then inexperienced eye, seemed a perfect cataract. Often, too, the autumnal gales, rushing through the gullies of the hills, would lash the lovely lakes into fury, and

raise quite respectable storms upon their usually placid bosoms. My admiration of and intimacy with old Ocean in his savage moods, indeed, made me sometimes banter Ruth a good deal on these lake tempests, which I would laughingly compare to the effect of the breath on a wash-hand-basin, but, notwithstanding my raillery, I was not insensible to the beauty of the scenery whether in storm or calm, and evinced quite admiration enough to satisfy my guide.

Amy wrote to me from time to time; indeed she was a very good correspondant, and used to give me full details of all that went on at home. In one of her letters she mentioned that, instead of going to their old quarters for the winter, Miss Annesley and Edith were gone to Italy from Calvers; Mr. Annesley, she said, had accompanied them, but she believed he did not intend to remain all the winter, and was likely to be soon home again, for he was busier than ever about the foundation, or rather revival of the old widow's fund. Edith had been desirous of having almshouses built in the park, away from the village, with a church attached, something after the picturesque plan of the beautiful old establishment of S. Cross; but besides that Mr. Annesley said such a building would swallow up all the funds, it

would also defeat his object, which was not to found an establishment no longer required in the present day, but merely to provide for the comfort of a few old women, who would otherwise have to give up their cottages and go into the Union. He wished them to remain in the midst of their families, and not to take them from the parish church—but only to revive a lapsed charity, whereby they would receive a comfortable maintenance, with a dinner two or three times a year at the Grange, as of old.

The next letter was written less cheerfully, there seemed to be something which harassed her mind, and gave a tinge of bitterness to all she said. I could not trace the cause till I came to the conclusion, when she spoke of Mr. Claytoun being at home again. He had called at the Rectory more than once, and at last my father had given him to understand he wished his visits to be discontinued; this had led to an explanation, his offer had been renewed and again refused; Amy said, she thought it hard, he had been very steady, every one said, for the last year, and my father must be prejudiced against him. Mrs. Mainwaring had proposed taking her to a public ball at Winterford, and my father had declined to let her go; she was beginning to feel very rebellious she

said, and hoped he would not provoke her too far, for though she had been patient and submissive for more than a year, in the hope that the prepossession against Percy would subside, she was not gifted with more endurance than the worm.

The concluding words made me anxious, while they threw a light upon her late behaviour, and I began to wish myself at home again, for I thought, slight as was the influence I possessed in the house, and especially with Amy, that I might be able to do some little good, perhaps. One is so prone, in all cases, to think one's presence can work wonders; so I hinted to Ruth the expediency of leaving Alverstoke, where I had now been just a month; of course I could not explain my reasons, consequently my arguments were not so persuasive as they might have been, and were easily overborne by her entreaties to remain, warmly seconded as they were by those of her father; for I believe he begun really to like me, and in many ways I had learned to become useful to him; besides he was glad that Ruth should have a companion, and was pleased to see that she had gained cheerfulness since I had been there; indeed there was more life in the house

altogether, which will seem laughable to those who have traced my character, hitherto, no doubt. I think, however, I was much more animated now that I was relieved from the depressing effect of finding myself constantly put down and kept under at home. I had indeed my own individual trouble, but long habit of bearing my burdens alone, had made it not difficult to thrust even this away into a dark corner of my heart, and cover it with a coat of cheerfulness, as bees are known to dispose of an intrusive mouse, who has made his way into the hive. I exerted myself greatly too, to please the Earl and cheer Ruth, and as Clarence was gay and lively, and as quickly restored to good-humour as he was easily put out, I could readily believe Ruth's assertion, that the house seemed another thing now, and that we made her father so happy that she hoped I would not think of leaving yet.

So I wrote a long letter to Amy, sympathizing in her sorrows, but entreating her not to provoke or annoy my father, and reminding her of the assurances she had formerly given me, that Mr. Claytoun was nothing to her, which feeling I did not suppose there had been anything to change. I have no doubt I gave her a great deal of very

excellent advice, though it would hardly be worth while to record it, even if it had not in effect escaped my memory. It is a commodity of which every one has always a large stock on hand, ready for any emergency; there is such a satisfactory feeling, too, in administering the same to our friends, it exalts us into temporary importance, and gives us a comfortable consciousness of superiority; and I doubt not, I was as well provided as the rest of the world. Nothing, in short, is easier than to tell people what they ought to do, the way to do it is sometimes more intricate, but with that, advisers have not to burden themselves; they point out the road and leave it to those of whom they constitute themselves the guides, to avoid the roughnesses, to escape the swamps, to beware of the precipices, to climb the hills, and descend the vallies as best they can. They are but the sign posts, there is the road, they say, clearly before you, walk along, it and be grateful for the service we render in pointing it out.

Advice, however, like many another medicine is more often prescribed than taken, and by none less frequently than by those who are the most ready to administer it to others. So whatever sage counsel I may have bestowed on Amy, was

probably put aside for a convenient season, and in the meantime having satisfied myself by dispatching my letter, I returned to the pleasant occupation of our time at Alverstoke.

CHAPTER II.

"When I have gazed
From some high eminence on goodly vales,
And cots and villages embowered below,
The thought would rise that all to me was strange
Amid the scenes so fair, nor one small spot
Where my tired mind might rest, and call it home."

SOUTHEY.

BUT indifferent as Clarence was about his cousin, I was glad to find he took some interest in his future property. One day, the Earl had consented to allow me to take Ruth's office of rubbing his ankles and reading to him, while she and her cousin took a ride. The Earl was probably feeling better that day, for when they returned, and Ruth went up-stairs to change her dress, he detained Clarence in the library.

"I have been wishing to speak to you, my dear Clarence," he said, "and as it will not be keeping you from Ruth now, perhaps you will give me a few minutes of your time. You know it is not

often that my poor health will allow of my attending to anything like business, so when it does, I like to take advantage of the moment."

I was getting up from the low stool on which I had been sitting, to leave the room, but Lord Ottersee requested me to remain, saying that he had nothing to discuss with his nephew that was any secret from me, so I resumed my occupation of rubbing.

"I am quite at your service, Sir," Clarence replied, sitting down at the table, "indeed I am glad of the opportunity myself, as I was wishing for some talk with you."

"Ah, I can well guess your business," the Earl said, with a pleased smile, "perhaps mine may be the same."

"Was it anything connected with the estate?" Clarence asked.

"Not altogether," the Earl replied languidly, "indeed you know my health is so indifferent, that I leave the management of that wholly to Rigby, I cannot enter into details of that sort."

"I am sorry," Clarence answered gravely, "and yet in this instance it is satisfactory to find that it is rather with him than with you that the blame lies. We passed through Barton-End to-day in in our ride, and I never was more horrified than

to see the state of the cottages there, and the people. The one probably re-acts on the other, but a more deplorable spot it would be difficult to find. Some of the roofs almost fallen in, the gardens nothing but rubbish-ground, before each door a dung-heap and a pool of stagnant water, and from the glimpses I got into the interiors, they are in a corresponding state. I wished to stop and speak with the people, but as Ruth was with me I thought it better not."

"Quite right," interposed the Earl. Clarence went on.

"They seemed to be a rough set; one or two brawny looking men lolled idly in their doorways, smoking, and a number of half clothed children, barefooted, were hardly distinguishable from the dirt amidst which they were playing—while the mothers, uncombed and gaunt, stood and stared at us, or scolded and cuffed the children for not getting out of the way of the horses. Surely, Sir, something might be, ought to be done with these people. Rigby must be to blame."

"Oh, yes," said the Earl, looking terribly bored, "I believe they are a shocking set, I have heard complaints of them. For myself, I never go in that direction when I drive, it does not lie in my way. Yes, I suppose, something might be done;

they must all be turned out and the cottages repaired, and some decent people put into them."

"And what is to become of those who are turned out, Sir?" Clarence asked.

"My dear boy, how should I know? I suppose they will go somewhere else, that is their concern. But I am sure it is dangerous to have such people about us; the farmers complain of their poultry-yards being robbed, and Gibbons speaks of depredations among the game; no doubt they are the delinquents, though Rigby always blames the gipsies; yes, they shall be turned out."

"And will the hen-roosts and preserves be any safer when these people are turned loose on the neighbourhood to live as they can? What is to become of them?" Clarence persisted.

"My dear Clarence, I am not equal to all this," the Earl exclaimed, passing his long white hand across his brow. "I told you it was not what I could attend to. Rigby must see to all this."

"And you feel sure you can depend upon Rigby, Sir?" Clarence went on.

"Depend upon him, why not?" said the Earl peevishly, "I wish Clarence you would not worry me so, I hate suspicious people, it is so uncomfortable to suspect."

"Quite true, Sir," Clarence continued, "but

when one sees palpable neglect in one matter, it is natural and perhaps right to suspect in another. These houses are in a remote part of the estate, quite on the border, and close to the public road; you perhaps never go in that direction yourself, but travellers must form a bad opinion of a landlord who could suffer such places on his property. That is certainly only a secondary consideration, yet it has its weight, not only in example, but in the countenance it gives to those disaffected spirits hereabouts, who are always trying to stir up the poor against the rich. Why should these poor people be ejected? why not civilized? As human beings, as tenants, above all, as christians, they have claims to be so."

"I know nothing about that, Clarence; they are only a set of miners, I believe, and I suppose their overseers or masters attend to those matters."

"It does not look much like it, Sir," Clarence went on pertinaciously, "I saw no church within some miles, only a conventicle in the hamlet, with a rather better sort of house attached to it, whereon was a sign board, importing that 'Joshua Robson made and mended shoes there.' I conclude he is the preacher, but it is not likely that the people would get much good instruction from such a man."

"If he mend shoes, he at least mends soles," the Earl replied, laughing at his stale joke, "he is good enough for the people I dare say. Folks of that sort understand such men better than educated gentlemen."

"Excuse me, Sir, if we differ there," Clarence replied, "but there is no need to enter into an argument on that point now; I feel sure, however, that the poor and ignorant can not only appreciate the instruction they receive from educated minds, but that such have a greater hold both on their respect and affection; and we may trust that they will at least use the influence so gained for the good of the people, in every sense. But the present matter is," he went on more rapidly, as the Earl threw himself back with a sigh of fatigue, "such a nuisance exists; for all sakes it ought not to be tolerated; how is it to be abated?"

"I know of no other way than the one I named," the Earl answered languidly, "but indeed Rigby should attend to it."

"Then you authorize me to speak to Rigby, Sir," was Clarence's rejoinder. "Ruth and I were talking of it, and she quite agrees with me, indeed I believe I have spoken her words."

"Oh yes!" the Earl said impatiently, "speak

to Rigby; anything you like and Ruth thinks right; but about Ruth, that was what I wished to say to you."

I made another movement to rise, but the Earl's hand laid on my shoulder prevented me, so thinking that Clarence might feel annoyance if I seemed to be attending to what passed, I affected to be interested in the book before me, whilst continuing the mechanical occupation of rubbing, though I could not but hear all that was said.

"You know my wishes on this subject, Clarence," Lord Ottersee went on, "life is very uncertain and my health very precarious, and the first desire of my heart is to see Ruth your wife, and to know that the hour of my death will make her the Countess of Ottersee. I think she will be willing to humour me in this, Clarence, as she is, dear child, in everything, and of course I cannot doubt your readiness. So I hope you will urge her to name a time not very remote, for your marriage."

It was now Clarence's turn to look grave and annoyed, as he answered slowly, all his former animation gone. "I should be sorry to thwart your wishes, Sir, which are no doubt very natural; but as this matter has been arranged for me, I have little voice in it and must leave you and my

mother to arrange it as you like best. Only I must own that I should like a few more years to pass before assuming the dignity of a married man. I would fain see a little more of the world first; I like my profession and have no wish to give it up at present: both Ruth and I are so young that I think we may be allowed a little more liberty before we marry."

"Not a very lover-like speech Clarence," his uncle observed in a tone of pique.

"You must remember, uncle, that I do not profess to be an impatient lover; we are very happy as we are; this has been an affair settled without consulting the feelings of either party, and though we may not desire to recede from the engagement, I would rather not hurry it unnecessarily to a conclusion, nor do I suppose Ruth would willingly take extra duties upon herself at present."

"Well you must please yourselves in the affair I suppose," the Earl said languidly, a little touched perhaps by Clarence's last suggestion. "True, you are both young, but my strongest wish is to see you united during my life time."

"That I trust will enable us to postpone it for some years yet, Sir," Clarence remarked.

"If Ruth be of the same mind with yourself, I must be content to wait," the Earl said in a

cold displeased tone; "but here she comes," he continued, brightening up as the door opened, and his beloved child appeared.

"Have you wanted me, dear papa?" she asked, going up to his couch and kissing him.

"My darling, you know I always want you," was the fond reply. "But only to look at your sweet face, my child, for Mabel has supplied your place nicely. You have a hand as soft and gentle almost as Ruth's, Mabel," he said, turning to me, while his arm was thrown round his child's waist. "Thank you, my dear, for taking her place so nicely; I may release you now, for to look at Ruth's face is enough to soothe all my pains. Sit down, my child, and tell me all about your ride; Clarence has come home in a most reformatory spirit, has he infected you?"

She seated herself on the side of his couch, and began to talk in her quiet, simple manner; and not at all sorry to be set at liberty, I left the room, and Clarence followed immediately.

"This is too hard!" he said in an angry tone, as he crossed the hall to the drawing-room, "that selfish old man who spent all his own youth in pleasing himself, would grudge me even one year of liberty. He had better take care what he

is about, for if he forces me to marry that poor pale, cold thing, it may be the worse for her, and for me too."

"Oh, Clarence!" I exclaimed, "how can you speak so unkindly of dear Ruth, so sweet and gentle and patient as she is, and so ready to please her father!"

"I don't doubt it, the bit of ice!" he said with a sneer. "She would like well enough to keep her present station at Alverstoke, but I hate such tame, spiritless things. I would rather have a little girl whom it would be some trouble to win, and some trouble to keep when she is won; give me fire, not ice!"

"Ruth is not ice, Clarence, she has a heart as warm, and as capable of loving fondly as anybody, she could not love her father so devotedly, or give herself up so entirely to him, if she were cold hearted."

"I like a girl who can love some one beside her father;" Clarence replied, "does she shew any love for me?"

"Oh, man, thy name is selfishness!" I exclaimed, "and pray, Clarence, how have you wooed her love? and what love have you shewn to her?"

"I am not hypocrite or villain enough to do

so?" he returned, passionately, "I do not love her—I never can love her—I love—"

"Hush, hush, Clarence! you have no business to acknowledge that love," I interposed, knowing well that it was Edith he meant, "you do her as much injury as you do Ruth, and you would mar the happiness of every one."

"Perhaps I might make the happiness of some," he answered with an arch smile; "I can't understand, Mabel, why you should take the trouble to interfere in this matter. Do you believe that Annesley loves Edith, or she him? Do you think they are in the least suited to each other?" he said with vehemence.

"I don't know!" I replied, with an involuntary sigh, "and it is no business of mine; I only know that you are engaged to Ruth, and that you will break her father's heart if you do not fulfil the engagement; that she is quite enough disposed to love you, if only you will give her the least pretext for doing so, and will determine to conquer a mere fancy, which on all accounts you have no business to indulge. Devote to your cousin all the thought and attention, which now you offer to another whom you ought not to think of, and no doubt you will soon win love in return."

"Well, Mabel, you are the most disinterested advocate I ever knew," he answered, laughing, "I hope Annesley appreciates the service you would fain render him."

"Mr. Annesley thinks neither of me, nor of my services," I began, but I felt the words were too insincere, at least I could not honestly say that I wished them true, so breaking off I said, "but there is no occasion to talk of any one but Ruth."

"True, Mabel, and as that is not a subject to my taste, I will go and find Rigby, who, I suspect, is as great a scoundrel as my noble uncle would fain make of me."

And so we parted, and soon after, Ruth joined me in the drawing-room.

"Papa is asleep now," she said, so we drew our chairs before the fire and enjoyed a pleasant cosey hour till the dressing bell sounded.

I was at this time beginning to get a little uneasy about Amy. A week had elapsed and no answer to my last letter, and as day after day went by in silence, I could not help feeling very anxious. At first, I imagined she might be angry with me for presuming to give her any advice. I had certainly stepped out of my place in doing so; and what might, perhaps,

have been tolerated in any other younger sister, would become an offence in me, incapable as I was considered by all who had anything to do with me, (oneindulgent heart excepted) of forming an opinion, or acting with discretion under any circumstances.

Then gradually this apprehension changed into another fear—that of illness; was my father ill and Amy without time to write!—or Amy herself?—but in either case there was old Phœbe, or the schoolmistress, or even Mrs. Mainwaring in the neighbourhood. Besides, Mrs. Aubrey would naturally have mentioned it in her letters to Clarence or Ruth, for though she was but seldom at the Rectory, she was a parishioner, and too near a neighbour not to hear if anything was wrong there. I did not like to impart my troubles; from a child I was so accustomed to bear everything in silence, without seeking for the sympathy which I knew would be withheld, that it had become a habit too strong to be broken; therefore, though I looked anxiously when the post-bag made its daily appearance at the breakfast table, I said nothing, even to Ruth.

It was nearly a fortnight since any letter had come from home, and my uneasiness was becoming almost too much for silence, when, one afternoon just as we had gone upstairs to dress

for dinner, Ruth's maid came to tell me that a gentleman was below who had just arrived, and wished to see me.

I don't know what at that moment I thought or feared; such a multitude of conflicting ideas rushed into my mind, that I believe none took any definite form, and I stood for a moment as one petrified.

The girl looked alarmed. "The gentleman sent his card, Miss," she said, "with a message that he called to see you as he was passing this way," at the same time putting Mr. Annesley's card into my hands. I looked at it without at first being able to read the name, though it was legible enough, till at last Ruth, who had joined me, said, "Mr. Annesley, Mabel." But my thoughts were still in a state of confusion. "Mr. Annesley!" I replied, "what could bring him here, how did he look?" and then all at once remembering that the servant could draw no auguries from a stranger's face, and that, indeed, she had not even seen him, I was running rapidly down stairs when Ruth stopped me. "Be sure you ask Mr. Annesley to stay, Mabel," she said, "papa knows and likes him, and I shall be down myself presently."

I looked up with a quick "thank you, dear

Ruth," and then ran on till I came to the drawing-room door, and there I stood for an instant; but I suppose he had heard my rapid step before, for he opened the door and met me. I scanned his face eagerly as I gave him my hand, and the quiet smile reassured me.

"They are all well at home then," I said, "and you are not sent to fetch me back?"

"There is no illness, Mabel," he replied, "but I intend to take you home, if you will go with me—your papa wants you, Amy has left him."

I looked earnestly into his face, hoping that he would go on, and afraid to ask what he meant.

"Amy has left him?" I repeated slowly, "where is she gone, and why?"

"Come and sit down," he said, kindly drawing me towards the fire-place, "you are shivering. Amy is married," he went on, still holding my two hands as he seated himself beside me.

"Married?" I echoed once more, "and why—"

"She has eloped, I am sorry to say," he continued, interrupting me.

I sat stupified. Such an idea had not crossed my mind; amidst all my apprehensions I don't think the possibility of Amy's taking that step had once occurred to me. We lived in a remote

place, and not having mingled very intimately with many girls of our own age, had never indulged much in the gossip about love and marriage, so often discussed confidentially round the bed-room fire; therefore in spite of proposals from Mr. Claytoun and Sholto Forster, the idea of matrimony had always been a very indistinct one. And now Amy was absolutely married! there had been nothing to accustom me to the thought; and worse still, she had defied my father, gone contrary to his twice expressed wishes, and run away! for I could not doubt for a moment with whom she had left her home, so many circumstances all at once seemed to bring the conviction so clearly to my understanding.

Such a wave of memories rushed over me at that instant, such a breaking up of all our childhood ties, such a vision of my father's grief and disappointment in the child he was so fond and proud of, that I utterly gave way, and drawing my hands from Mr. Annesley's grasp, I covered my face with them and sobbed bitterly.

"Poor dear Mabel;" he said, "I knew this would wound your loving heart! but we must think of your father," he went on, evidently wishing to turn my thoughts, "he is deeply grieved."

"Oh, take me to him, dear Mr. Annesley!"

I exclaimed, "he must not be alone, let us go, Ruth will understand all."

How gently he soothed me, how kindly he spoke! We would go next morning by the first train, he said, it would not do for me to travel all night; I should only be knocked up, and unfit to help or comfort my father when I got home; my Aunt Stanley was already there, so that he was not alone, and at present he bore it better than could have been expected. By degrees he entered into all the details. He had returned from Italy soon after Mr. Claytoun's second refusal, of which my father had told him. The change in Amy's manner had struck him one day that he dined at the Rectory, about a week ago; she had been so very unequal in her spirits, sometimes so merry, and then so lost in thought, but even that had not prepared him for the intelligence, when on obeying the summons that reached him a few days after from the Rectory, he was told that she had left her home with Percy Claytoun.

We talked on for a long time, for he had much to tell, and I was anxious to hear all; and in the midst of our conversation, Ruth joined us and Clarence, and their astonishment almost equalled mine; but they could not participate in the deep grief which I felt, though they gave me all their

sympathy. I was still anxious to start at once, but Ruth was quite of Mr. Annesley's opinion, that it would be better to wait till the morning; and when he and Clarence came to examine the train-book, they found that we could not possibly reach the station in time for the only other train that would pass, before eight o'clock next morning. So I had to try and content myself to remain where I was, while my spirit was chafing and fretting against the delay, for I seemed to think that if they would only let me make the attempt, I should be sure to find a train that would take me on that evening. I could not tell how or where, but I felt certain they must have made a mistake, and that I knew much better than any one else; I said nothing, however, and tried to acquiesce and be satisfied; but it was not easy to deceive the kind eyes that were watching every change of my countenance, and Mr. Annesley presently brought the book and shewed me clearly that there would be no use in attempting it, and that even could it have been done, my unexpected arrival would only agitate my father, who did not look for me till the next evening. "And so, Mabel," he ended with a smile, "you must endeavour to wait patiently, and believe that sometimes endurance is better than action."

Endurance! yes, it was but another application of my old lesson, therefore I did my best to smile, and thank him for all his thoughtful kindness, and seeing Clarence was on thorns to ask him something about Edith, I turned to Ruth; and we talked of the abruptness of our separation, and our mutual regret, and hope of meeting again; when dinner was announced, I remembered that I was still in my morning dress, and not feeling the least disposed for that meal, I was asking Ruth if I might not be excused going in, when Mr. Annesley interfered, saying, playfully, that he was now invested with my father's authority, and as he thought it would be better for myself and every one else that I should go into dinner with the rest, he hoped I was not going to rebel against the first exercise of his prerogative. So he drew my arm within his, and Clarence took his cousin, and we went into the dining-room, where we found Lord Ottersee, who always took his place at the table before the guests came from the drawing-room.

Of course no allusion was made to the object of Mr. Annesley's visit, till the servants had left the room, and then it was all told as quietly as possible, for the Earl was known to dislike any excitement. The evening passed on, and when Lord

Ottersee wanted me to sing to him as usual, Ruth went up and kissed him, declaring, while she laughed, that she was getting quite jealous of Mabel, for he never cared to hear her play and sing now, so she meant to punish him that evening and make him listen to her, and her only. The poor old man laughed, and patted her cheeks as he assured her he should be very well contented, for the nightingale itself was not so sweet to his ears, as the voice of his own darling Ruth. At the same time, Mr. Annesley brought a chess table up to my chair and challenged me to a game, but we sat and talked more than played; and Clarence occupied himself with a new Quarterly till the time came for separation.

CHAPTER III.

"Umile in tanta gloria."

PETRARCH.

"But what are past or future joys?
The present is our own!
And he is wise who best employs
The passing hour alone."

HEBER.

It is of no use to dwell much upon the time that followed. It was a very painful one; and yet it had gleams of brightness, which, like sunbeams on a stormy day, shone out all the more brilliantly for the deep gloom around. I could not but enjoy the journey home, in spite of all my grief, for no one knew better than my companion how to lead the mind gently away, and beguile it of present sorrow; and then there was a pleasure in returning to my own dear home, though the beloved sister was no longer there to welcome me; for happy as I had been during my visit at Alverstoke, I had not been entirely free from the malady of home-sickness. The lake which was skirted by

the park, did not compensate for the want of the grand and glorious ocean; I missed many dear occupations and privileges which I had been accustomed to at Arden Rise, and there was nothing in all the beautifully furnished house, well-arranged gardens, and richly wooded park, equal in my mind to the dear Grange, with its antique furniture, its armoury, and quaint gardens, above all to that dimly-lighted library with its well filled bookshelves.

It was delicious, too, to feel oneself so studied, so cared for, as I was during that journey! Oh, Edith, how lightly you wore this inestimable jewel! how little you recked of its worth!

Over and over again, Mr. Annesley detailed to my untiring ears all the particulars of Amy's flight; the first suspicion, the gradual confirmation, the pursuit, the grief of my father, the opportune arrival of Aunt Martha—I did not discover till she told me afterwards herself, that it was a telegraphic message from Mr. Annesley which brought her to the spot so opportunely—the return of those who had followed the fugitives. Then, by degrees, he led me away to think of Edith; he described their journey, the places they had passed through, the galleries that he knew I should have taken such delight in, the enjoyment

of Edith, and her wild pleasure in travelling; his hopes that the winter in such a climate would be serviceable to his sister: his own prospects of returning thither in the spring to bring them home, or at least homeward, for he was anxious that Edith should travel a good deal more. He hoped that the associations all around her during this winter in Rome, might awaken some better appreciation of them; he wished, he said, that he could discover more depth of character in her, less childishness, which, pretty as it was at fifteen or sixteen, was even now beginning to look inappropriate. He would like to see her more of a companion than a plaything, one who would be to her husband, whoever he might be, a sharer of his troubles and difficulties, a counsellor, a help-mate, as well as a brightener of his joys, and companion of his pleasures.

He had not spoken on this subject before; I had never heard him express any feeling of dissatisfaction with the bright little humming-bird, and if I knew in my own heart, that there were things he disliked or wished altered, it was only because long study and intimate knowledge of the slightest change of countenance or inflexion of voice, had enabled me to read unerringly their meaning. He often sighed now as he spoke of his ward, as she

was, and as he wished her to be: I tried to make him think and hope that time would bring out latent powers. "Hitherto," I said, "she has literally lived upon nectar, fed upon roses, her life has been one of unclouded sunshine, this cannot last; and when the shadows come, as come they must, you will find the glancing panoply of the little humming-bird is something better than mere glitter."

"It may be so, Mabel," he answered with a sigh, and without raising his eyes from the ground, "but if I could choose my companion for life—my wife in fact—it would be one who had been brought up in shadow, not in sunshine."

"And into what a rich glowing sunshine would you transplant her," was my thought, though I forbore to give it expression; he, too, was silent for a minute, and then he went on:—

"Yes, poor child! the shadow, as you say, must come any way, even to her. I fear, her's is a difficult position even for one with a stronger character, and she seems peculiarly unfitted for it; but I believe if we could see clearly into all these things, we should find many of our anxieties for ourselves and others quite unnecessary, and that each one was in reality, placed in just the very position best calculated to bring out and strengthen

that part of the character, naturally the weakest."

"I wonder which is that part of your's," I thought, as I looked in silence out of the window, "for hitherto I have seen nothing but what is strong and perfect. I have sometimes thought," I began, and then frightened at the recollection of whom I was speaking to, I stopped suddenly and felt myself colour.

"May I not have the result of your thoughts, Mabel?" he asked smilingly, as I remained silent. I hesitated a moment and then said slowly, "I was thinking of Clarence and Ruth."

"And what of them Mabel?" he inquired again, with apparently a most unusual and provoking desire to make me speak out.

"I think her so loveable and fear he does not appreciate her, he thinks her cold and tame," I replied, rather equivocally, for it was only a part of my thoughts.

"And prefers a certain little damsel to whom neither of those epithets are applicable, is it not so, Mabel?" he said. "I have not been blind to this, nor is the little lady herself, and it has given me a good deal of pain you may be sure."

"Edith might have been pleased with Clarence and liked his attentions," I remarked apologetically

"but there could be no danger of his winning her affections, that is—" I tried to correct myself and paused.

"You would say that Edith has too much good feeling and principle, both as regards herself and Lady Ruth, to accept his attentions as more than a passing compliment. I believe so myself, but—" he went on smilingly, "it is too dangerous a game to allow her to proceed with; I was made uneasy at Brackenhurst, though I remember your saying you did not think Lady Ruth was."

I answered, no, for that I really did not think Ruth cared much for him, perhaps because it was a matter she had not been called upon to consider; and that I regretted she showed so much indifference in her manner, for I thought there was more solidity in Clarence than appeared on the surface; and that if they knew each other better, they would esteem each other more; and then I told him of the conversation he had held with the Earl on the subject of Barton End.

"I am glad to hear this of Clarence," he said, "for I am quite of your opinion, that Lady Ruth hides a great deal of heart under a cold exterior; she is not the only one of my acquaintance who practices such hypocrisy," he added smiling at me, "and I hope more companionship between the

cousins will induce a closer acquaintance with each other's good qualities. But this is our station, Mabel, and the pleasant journey is at an end."

Pleasant journey! yes indeed it had been pleasant! how could I have believed when I entered the train this morning, in cold and darkness without, and sorrow and desolation within, that I could have been so entirely taken away from myself and my own thoughts, as that the announcement of Winterford station would have seemed to come too soon. It was the first time Mr. Annesley had ever talked, as it were, confidentially with me; hitherto his conversation, delightful as it always was, had been confined to general and indifferent subjects; to-day he had taken me into his intimate friendship, had led me, so to speak, behind the curtain of his inner life, and shewn me some of his secret thoughts; he had alluded to his position with regard to Edith, and spoken openly of her failings, and of his wishes about her, as he would not have done to a mere common acquaintance. There was, it is true, bitter mingled with the sweet, but it was not the first infliction of a wound, it was only a quiet recognition that the wound existed, and must be kindly dealt with, and might be gently examined, and even while under examination, a soothing potion had been ad-

ministered which lulled the pain, and left the pleasant flavour on the palate of my mind that I was an acknowledged friend, and thought worthy to share, and, perhaps in some degree, to alleviate his troubles.

These thoughts and many others less pleasant, occupied me as I sat by the dirty looking fire in the comfortless waiting room, while Mr. Annesley was looking after my luggage and seeing it placed on the carriage. In a few minutes he joined me.

"All is ready now, Mabel," he said, giving me his arm and leading me out into the dreary, chilly dusk of a November evening. He handed me into the fly and took his seat beside me, and soon we were beyond the lights of the town, and familiar objects begun to flit by in the twilight as we got nearer and nearer to Arden Rise. I leaned back in silence, trying to understand the reality of what seemed still only a wild dream.

The road appeared interminable, and yet I dreaded to find myself at the end of it. At last we entered the village, and the Grange gates came in sight; I half feared he would leave me there, and I believe he saw me lean forward, and then look towards him as we approached them, for he observed cheerfully,

"No, Mabel, I must deliver up my charge into the legitimate hands before I leave her, and shall expect a cup of tea as a reward for the faithful discharge of my duty."

The cheerfulness of the tone, I know not why, gave me hope that things might be better at home than I had anticipated, and as we stopped at the Rectory gates, I willingly promised him the recompense he claimed; in another minute we were before the porch, and my father was opening the carriage door, while in the bright light of the hall I could see old Phœbe, and the figure of Aunt Martha standing with the drawing-room door in her hand.

My father embraced me tenderly, and said he was very glad to get me home again, he could not afford to lose both his girls, though he feared that he had brought me from a pleasant visit to a dull home now; and as I kissed him and clung fondly about his neck, I declared "home could never be dull to me, I was too glad to be there again, though I had enjoyed my visit very much," and then I whispered, "Poor Amy, papa! I am so sorry."

There was no time to say more, or for my father to make any reply, for Phœbe was waiting to shake hands with me, and by that

time we had reached the drawing-room, and Aunt Martha. I missed poor Amy's bright, sunny face in that warm cheerful-looking room, and could see that my father felt the same want, for he heaved a deep sigh as he sat down at the comfortable tea-table; but just then Mr. Annesley came in, and he entered into all the details of the journey, and talked about Alverstoke, and Lady Ruth, and Clarence, and my father was soon conversing with something of his own cheerfulness. But I could see that there was a change in him, even in these few days, the trouble had told upon him. I turned to Aunt Martha after looking steadily at him for some time, while he was talking with Mr. Annesley, and she understood my glance, and answered it by a shake of the head and a deep sigh, which told me that it was no fancy of mine, and that she had observed there was a break.

For a day or two, my father seemed to have turned on me all his former fondness for Amy. He walked with me for a long time in the garden, next morning, after the early service, and told me all particulars of the sad affair, and his strong objections to Percy Claytoun.

"Poor Amy!" I ventured to say, "you will

forgive her, papa? I am sure she must grieve to have caused you sorrow."

"Oh yes, my dear!" he answered, with a sigh, "I could not but forgive her, though she does not know it yet. She will know it soon, however, for how could I harbour resentment against one who was so the pride and darling of my heart? It is cruel ingratitude, but yet I cannot be angry with her, it would be worse than anything, and I cannot bear to think she should be unhappy. For her sake, too, I will even receive Percy, deeply as he has wounded me; though I have no confidence in him; I would never have stood in the way of her real happiness, and would have put aside many private feelings for her sake, but I know this must end in misery."

"Don't you think, dear papa, that circumstances might change Percy's habits?" I urged, "and that though he has been wild, he may be different now."

"I wish I could, my child," he answered, "and if it were but wildness, I might hope, as you say, that a creature so good and unselfish as Amy, might work a change for the better; but I fear there is more than wildness—want of principle."

I could not but be struck by the fondness, which in spite of the thoughtless selfishness Amy

had just shewn, so entirely blinded my father to any fault in her, but of course I abstained from open remark.

Indeed, it grieved and distressed me more than I can tell, to see the change that day by day became more plainly perceptible in my father. The brisk active step was no longer heard, he seemed to avoid going among the cottagers, for in their simple ignorance, they shewed their sympathy in the way they best understood, by expressing their concern, and noticing his altered looks, and every such remark was as a dagger in his heart.

The poor, truly, have little conception of the delicacy of silent sympathy, and even think it complimentary, to remark that one is looking ill, since among themselves, illness is only considered as laying a stronger claim upon the care and interest of others, and especially their richer neighbours; with the same feeling, perhaps, is connected their love of imparting bad news; this gives a something of importance to the speaker, as sickness for a time invests the sufferer with a degree of consequence. When I have called upon a cottager, in return for my own inquiries as to the health of the family, I have often been told, "you are looking but poorly yourself, Miss;"

and though in perfect health at the time, the doubtful compliment has sometimes, by its reiteration, almost made me fancy, that I was not in reality so well as I had fancied myself a moment before.

But this is what every one must have remarked who knows anything about the poorer and uneducated classes, and one might give a hundred examples of different phases of the same feeling. It was brought to my mind just now, by the recollection of the effect, these continual remarks of the poor cottagers had on my father at the time. They used to enter on the subject, too, with me, and lament over "dear Miss Amy," and recall her bright looks and her pleasant ways; and then go on with a shake of the head, to fear it would not end well with her, they had "heard tell that young Mr. Claytoun was not just what he should be, and they were afraid as pretty Miss Amy would one day be sorry that she had ever listened to him."

I was quite willing that they should expend as much of their condolence as they liked on me; but I used to entreat them to abstain from saying anything of the kind to my father, as it distressed him so; and they would declare that "they would do anything sooner than distress the dear gentleman, for it nigh broke their

hearts to see him go moping about so sad like," and yet I knew that the next time he went there, the same condolences were offered.

All this had, indeed, a visible effect upon him, and not knowing how to put an end to what so continually kept alive the sorrow in his heart, I turned, after a while, to my old friend and counsellor, Mr. Annesley, for advice, and help if he could give it me. I knew that if any one could assist me he would, and as he walked by the side of Aunt Martha and myself, up and down the green terrace at the Grange, I poured out all my trouble and asked him to suggest a remedy. True, Philip would be at home in a day or two, and that might temporarily give a turn, perhaps, to the subject that my father's mind was perpetually dwelling upon; but it would not last long, and if I could only get him away from home for a time, so as to break the chain of association, and then manage to induce him to receive Amy and her husband at the Rectory when he returned —perhaps we might contrive to take him by surprise—perhaps—I went on rapidly, suggesting many ways, without seeing clearly any method of bringing even the most reasonable of them to bear. Mr. Annesley let me talk on without putting in a word, and I was beginning to feel

angry and disappointed, and to suspect, for the first time, that his interest in us had died out, and that he was unwilling to give me assistance; so, at last, with what must have been a most undignified attempt at dignity, for I was so near a burst of passionate tears that I could hardly command my voice, I turned to Aunt Martha observing,

"Well, auntie, it is of no use talking any longer about impossibilities. We have been taking up Mr. Annesley's time most unjustifiably, and forgetting that these matters cannot interest him;" and I was about to take leave of him with the air of an injured stage queen I daresay, when he stopped me with his usual quiet smile.

"Stay, Mabel," he said, "you have no reason to suppose that because I have listened in silence to the rapid out-pourings of your full, loving, warm heart, it was because I was indifferent either to the subject or the speaker; or to think that there was impossibility in any of the projects proposed; still less, unjustifiable occupation of my time, which you ought to know could not be employed in a more satisfactory manner. Like yourself, I have noticed all the marks of change you have detailed, and think I can suggest a plan to meet your wishes," and then he entered

into the scheme he had thought about. It was necessary for him, he asserted, to go to Calvers about some business, on which he should be very glad to have my father's opinion and advice, "and if I make it a matter of importance to myself," he went on, "there is little doubt of Mr. Willoughby's falling into my wishes."

"But the church," my aunt suggested, "that would be an insurmountable difficulty in my brother's mind, how could the daily service be carried on."

"I wish all other difficulties were as easy to be got over," he answered, laughing; "dear Mrs. Stanley, between Winterford Close and the neighbouring parishes, I will undertake that nothing be neglected, for the next month if necessary; but, as I hope to be at home again before Christmas, there is little more than a fortnight to provide for."

"And Amy, Mr. Annesley?" I inquired, "how is that to be brought about?"

"Without much difficulty, Mabel," he replied, "I have a plan for making the old Grange look a little cheerful this Christmas; why should I not ask the Claytouns to make me a visit? and why should not the Rectory family also come and see me? I have, as you know, a bower fit for any

bride; but if Amy should prefer afterwards to go on into the village, there will be no bars to prevent her flight."

"And I doubted your interest in us!" was all I could say, as, with tears in my eyes, I thought of his kindness and the absurdity of my late speech.

"It was very wrong in the fair Undine," he replied with a cheerful laugh; "and a second similar offence would be unpardonable, I warn her; she ought to have known me better. If you will give me a dinner at the Rectory this afternoon, I will propose the journey to Calvers when Mr. Willoughby and I are alone."

There was little necessity to assure him of a welcome, where he was such a frequent and honoured guest; but dear Aunt Martha, with her old fashioned hospitality, thought it incumbent on her to apologize for not having made the proposal herself, and to enter into many explanations as to the omission thereof, which I don't think he much attended to, though he made a profound bow at the end, laughing all the while, however, as he said, "the family were not generally so polite to him by half, and that for one invitation, he believed he was ten times a self-invited guest."

What arguments he used, I know not, but when

he and my father came into the drawing-room after dinner, where Aunt Martha and I were busily working, and a bright fire diffused a cheerful warm glow all over the room, I thought I had never seen my father so cheerful and like himself since my return from Alverstoke. He sat down by the little table, which always stood between his chair and the fire, with a book and a candle upon it, and when I rose, as he entered, and prepared to light the candle as usual for him, he prevented me with a smile.

"I am not going to read this evening, my girl," he said, "for my kind friend here has been making a request of me, which I don't like to refuse, though it will be obliging me to leave home, a thing that I have not now done for I don't know how long."

I saw the idea had given pleasure, and if ever gratitude was expressed by looks, I am sure mine must have spoken it that moment, as I glanced up to Mr. Annesley, who was standing a little in the back-ground, and whose eyes seemed to be watching mine, with a gladness in them that somehow made me drop my own at once. My father entered into a full detail of the whole scheme, while Mr. Annesley came round and drew a chair to the table close to me, carelessly turning over the leaves

of a book which lay before him. I was dreadfully afraid dear Aunt Martha would betray our little plan by some consciousness, for she was a bad dissembler; but the good old lady played her part to perfection, listened to all my father said, as if she heard it for the first time, and moving a little round towards his chair, entered into a variety of small household and parish details, which it would be necessary for her to attend to during his absence.

Meanwhile, Mr. Annesley continued to turn over the leaves of the book beside me; at last, he asked in a low tone, and without looking up, "Where did you learn that imposing air of dignity, which you practised upon me this morning Mabel? —at Alverstoke?"

"I am afraid it was the spontaneous growth of a proud and doubting heart; of which I need not tell you how ashamed I was the next minute," I replied.

"I am glad I have brought you to that," he said, "and trust I may never find symptoms of a similar growth springing up in the same soil; it is too rich to bear such weeds, which show evident neglect in the cultivator; I have not yet quite got over the shock you gave me!"

"At least, you took a noble revenge," I an-

swered, "the very idea seems to have done papa good."

"This will die away," he replied, "it is mere excitement, because the thing is unusual. But when I get him to Calvers, I shall endeavour to keep his mind thoroughly employed, so as to give it no time to spring back again. If we can once get him out of the habit of dwelling upon painful subjects, all will come right."

"And do you think there are real grounds for his apprehensions for Amy?" I asked.

"Only too good I fear," was his reply, "you may, perhaps, remember I once cautioned Clarence against the acquaintance. With all Percy's fascination, I doubt his heart."

"Poor Amy!" I sighed.

"Poor Amy has done it with her eyes open," he went on, "and were it not for other members of her family, would have none of my pity or help. But I could not bear to see my old friend's life poisoned, by one so unworthy of what I must call his foolish fondness; above all I must not have 'poor Amy,' subside into 'poor Mabel.'"

"I don't know how to thank you," I said.

"Do you mean that, Mabel, while there is a piano in the room?" he asked looking up at me.

"I have not sung since I came home," I said, "I don't know whether papa would like it."

"Mr. Willoughby," he exclaimed, resuming his usual tone, "Mabel tells me she has not allowed you to hear any of the new music she picked up at Alverstoke, which I think most culpable neglect; will you not lay your commands upon her to play and sing directly?"

The musical taste of my father was excited in a moment, he was delighted to hear I had anything new. Music was an unaccustomed sound to him of late, he observed, with a sigh, but he should be very glad to have it renewed. So I sat down, at once, and with such a double motive for my best exertions, it was hard, indeed, if they did not give the full and entire pleasure to both my auditors, which one expressed fluently, and the other as plainly felt.

CHAPTER IV.

"My cares are blessed thistles unto me,
Which wholesome are, although they bitter be,
And though their leaves with pricks are overgrown
(Which pain me) yet their flowers are full of down."

GEORGE WITHER.

THE Calvers expedition had all the good results that we hoped for, apparently, for my father returned home much better in health and spirits, and consequently less disposed to brood over the loss of Amy, and whatever was gloomy in her prospects. Philip was at home, too, and it was a fresh interest for him to examine into his progress, and continue his studies for an hour or two every morning. It gave him something absolutely to do, and during his absence, Aunt Martha and I had so well schooled the cottagers, that when he went amongst them, there were no more allusions to the past, except in the smiling curtsey, or pull of the forelock, as they remarked cheer-

fully that they were glad to see his Reverence looking so well again.

Amy and her husband came to the Grange a few days before Christmas; he had nearly a fortnight's leave. I was not present at the meeting between the fugitives and my father; though it took place at our own house, for the morning after their arrival, Mr. Annesley came in just as we had done breakfast; he pretended to rally us a good deal for lingering over it so long, and gradually led the conversation, I hardly know how, round to Amy, who had always been tea-maker. My father sighed at mention of her name, and hoped poor Amy would have a happy Christmas. Mr. Annesley coincided, adding that he hoped it would be a happy season to us all, particularly as he had some friends just come to the Grange to enliven it for him; "friends of yours, too, I think Mr. Willoughby," he went on, "or at least, I hope they soon will be, if they are not so already."

My father looked up quickly, and fixing his eyes anxiously on Mr. Annesley's face for a minute, exclaimed in a low voice, "Amy—is it not Annesley?"

"Come and see," he answered, smiling; adding as my father rose hastily, "you will find her in

your study;" but then noticing the unsteadiness of my father's step, he gave him his arm, and leading him to the study door, left him and returned to me.

"We shall have a merry Christmas yet, Mabel," he continued gaily, "Percy is outside, and I have told Amy she must make you all come up and dine at the Grange to-day; but in the meantime, you will not be wanted, so I wish you would walk with me as far as Adam Griffith's; Edith has sent something for old Molly, with orders that the venerable pair shall have a good Christmas dinner, which of course, I am bound to obey. There," he added, laughing, as Amy and her husband entered, "you may welcome Mrs. Claytoun, and receive a fraternal embrace from Percy, while I go in search of Master Philip, with a request that he will ride into Winterford for me, or rather for Mrs. Wilson."

Amy came bounding into the room, as gaily as if she had left it under very different circumstances. "It's all right, Mabel," she exclaimed, throwing her arms round me, "and dear papa is so delighted to have me back, that it is quite worth while to have run away."

I said, I was beyond measure glad to see her here again, and hoped now, papa would recover his spirits perfectly; and then Percy came forward

in his pleasant off-hand way, saying, "that we ought not to be very angry with him, for it would have been much less excusable if he could have known Amy without loving her," at the same time giving my cheek a brotherly salute.

"And you are all to dine at the Grange," Amy ran on, "and papa is coming up with us now. I feel quite like a queen in that bower-room of Edith's, Mabel; I don't know what the little lady would say, if she knew the liberty 'Gardie,' is taking with her property."

"It is very good of 'Gardie' to bring us all together again," I replied, laughing, "and I dare say Edith's anger will not be unappeasable."

"Yes, he is a capital old fellow, but saving Miss Edith's presence, I suspect it's all for the love of the fair Undine, eh, Mabel?" Amy said, looking up archly into my face.

"The fair Undine, as you call her, is not such a simpleton as to fancy any such thing, Amy," I replied with a laugh, and I fear, a blush too.

Amy laughed also, "never mind, Mabel," she said, "you must come and stay with us at Kington, and we'll soon find you a husband among some of our officers, won't we Percy?"

"Who is tampering with my charge?" asked

Mr. Annesley, as he entered at the moment, "Mabel, this is not safe society for you, so I must carry you off to old Adam's: Philip is going to the Grange with you and Mr. Willoughby, Amy, he is good enough to undertake my errand to Winterford; perhaps, Claytoun, you would like to ride with him as far as Everleigh, if so, there is another horse at your service. Come, Mabel, we must not let the sun get too forward on his journey before we set out on our's, for we shall have to call here again when we come back for Aunt Martha."

I could not understand how Amy could feel so perfectly light-hearted and careless as she did; surely she must have seen the change in my father, for though he was well in health now, and excited with the happiness of being reconciled to her, there were lines on his face, a stoop in his gait, and threads of silver in his hair, that had never been visible before.

"Amy is unchanged," was all the remark that Mr. Annesley made, as we walked briskly over the smooth down, and along the edge of the steep cliff which led to old Griffith's cottage; with the sun shining brightly overhead, and the sea sparkling below, as it rolled its long waves lazily up, and dashed them with a sullen plunge on the shore.

I think, under any circumstances, I must have felt happy that day; the idea that Amy was once more at home, and my father at that moment rejoicing in the pleasure of reconciliation, and, I hoped, forgetting all the sorrow he had gone through was alone exhilarating enough. I could have danced, or sung, or committed any extravagance as I went along; I felt an inclination to spring over every gorse-bush or molehill that lay in my way. It was like walking upon air, and I don't know when I ever talked and laughed with such entire abandonment. Mr. Annesley fully entered into my mood, and sympathized in the joy which I could not conceal. We glanced over innumerable topics of conversation, as the sea-birds floated over the waters below, sometimes stooping like them to dip our wings, as it were, and then soaring up again, away into the blue ether above. The glowing hues that tinged the whole landscape seemed bathing my own mind, or rather it was the sunshine in my heart which threw the golden light over all I looked upon. And my companion flung no shadow upon the bright visions in which I indulged, to damp my present happiness; so we walked on till we came to the old fisherman's cottage, and there he talked to them of Miss Edith, and displayed the treasures she had sent,

and gladdened their honest hearts by her kind recollections of them; while he thought, no doubt, that I was as blind as they were, and believed, like them, that all these good things were really sent by Edith, and that he was but the dispenser of her bounty.

I will not speak of that Christmas, there was nothing very stirring in it. We were a quiet party, and our pleasures would sound, perhaps, very insipid in the recapitulation. Percy and Amy did not stay many days at the Grange. As soon as the object of reconciliation had been gained, Mr. Annesley was very willing that they should comply with my father's wish to have them under his own roof. He left the Grange himself, the day after they came to us; he had promised, he said, that he would be with Edith to welcome the new year, he was not to return till the spring, and then only for a short time probably. His comings and goings to and from the Grange, gave to the old place the fitful, changeful aspect of an April day—one hour all sunshine and brightness, the next all gloom and sadness.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Mainwaring had not forgotten us; she was quite delighted at the return of Amy, not so much because of our happy reunion, as that Amy was a fresh object; she had acquired a

sort of éclat in Mrs. Mainwaring's estimation, by the step she had taken, and made a first rate occasion for the exercise of her patronage. So it was "Amy, you dear creature," at every word, and even Percy must have been quite unprepared for the long catalogue of good qualities that his wife seemed all at once to have acquired, in Mrs. Mainwaring's opinion. As to myself, I quite sunk into the shade, and silly as it was, I could not help feeling annoyance at the way in which I was quietly put down, and turned into something less than a shadow. If I played or sung, she would sit and listen, with a critical expression on her countenance and in her attitude, "as if," Mr. Annesley said, "as if she knew Beethoven from Bellini, or an oratorio from an opera." "Very pretty," was generally the praise I received; "and now, Amy dear, let me hear some of those beautiful things I am so fond of; delightfully Amy plays"—she would say aside to Percy,—"the Marchioness of Tantivy would be charmed with her; so clever the Marchioness is! sings so finely and speaks so many languages, quite a superior woman —*really* clever!" This was said with a glance at me.

"I think I have heard Annesley speak of her," Percy remarked one day.

"Mr. Annesley," she answered, with an ex-

pression of scorn, "the Marchioness would not think much of him; when I was at Nolands, she was surrounded by some of the first men in the world, really men of talent; Mr. Annesley would have been thought but little of among them. I must introduce Amy to the Marchioness, she would like her so much!"

As I have said, it was ridiculous to be annoyed by such trifles, and yet I never was in Mrs. Mainwaring's company, after I was grown up, without feeling a soreness when I left her—not, perhaps, that a word had been spoken which I could lay my finger upon and say, "that wounded me," but there was a manner and a tone pervading even her praise, which always left a jarring sound in my heart. Sometimes she seemed to assume that I was vain of my musical talents, and at once threw them into the shade by comparison with those of some one else, and yet not absolute comparison; only giving me that "faint praise" of which Byron tells us the effect, and immediately speaking of some one who "really did excel." Sometimes it was personal appearance; sometimes mere dress; and yet, in my own mind, I had the smallest possible opinion of her judgment, or even taste in such matters, so that, of course, it was the height of folly to be irritated

by such puny attacks, yet the sting of the emmet is not the less sharp that his proportions are so tiny. But I daresay there are many who can call to mind a Mrs. Mainwaring among their acquaintance, and who have equally smarted under the patronizing disparagement, even while they have despised it.

Meanwhile, Amy seemed, as Mr. Annesley had said, unchanged; she was as gay as ever, and seeing how fond she was of my father, one wondered more and more that she could ever have done anything to displease or vex him. It certainly astonished me to hear how she would laugh and talk with Mrs. Mainwaring in his presence; describing their adventures when they left Arden Rise, how they had speculated upon the effect the first discovery of her flight would produce, and wondered who would be sent in pursuit of them. Then she would speak of the gaiety of their life at Kington, where her husband's regiment was quartered—the balls they had been to, and the sensation her appearance had created—the charming house Percy had taken, and the stylish turnout he had set up. She seemed quite unconscious that every word was a fresh stab to my father, and yet nothing could weaken his fondness for her; he would sit and watch her, and listen to

her voice, as if it were the sole pleasure of his life. I was sorry to see Mrs. Mainwaring encourage her in such conversations, for to me it was evident the change there was in my father, and she must have known that such talk was painful to him, though so great was Amy's fascination, that he could never tear himself from her presence.

Of course there was the proper number of feastings to be gone through in honour of Amy's return. The Forsters invited us; but my father did not feel equal to much society, and Aunt Martha preferred remaining with him, so it was only Percy, Amy, and myself who accepted any of the invitations. Mrs. Aubrey, too, and Mrs. Mainwaring each gave a dinner on the occasion, and then the bride and bridegroom had to spend a day or two with Percy's family at Everleigh Court, which would have been an ordeal to any one but Amy; for Mr. Claytoun was no better pleased than my father, and the young ladies had commented in no measured terms upon Amy; but she seemed impervious to everything, and on such perfectly good terms with herself, that she managed to bring every one round to her own opinion. I think it must have been difficult to resist her charm; her manners were so winning

and so gay; she looked so happy, and every one knows that happiness is a great improver of the appearance; not that she had ever known sorrow, but now, happiness seemed to beam in every feature, and gave a wonderful animation to her beauty, as well as to her whole air. Percy, too, as I have said, was, if not strictly handsome, replete with fascination, and his admiration of, and attention to his beautiful bride, gave an additional interest to his pleasant, engaging manners.

I had much bantering to undergo from Mrs. Mainwaring, the day after we had dined at Brackenhurst, on the subject of Sholto Forster, who, however, was not at home at the time.

The interview which she had broken in upon in the Grange Library, had always been a source of curiosity to her. Strangely enough, she had never fathomed the mystery of that, for though it may be thought that, where it was confined to the breasts of two people, each equally interested in preserving the secret, it would have been a greater marvel had it come to her knowledge, I used sometimes to think she had ærial spirits at her command, so wonderfully did words and intentions, that had only been uttered within closed doors, often become known to her. Clarence

Aubrey, in allusion to this peculiar faculty, used laughingly to wonder what she paid annually for Secret Service money.

However, by some happy chance, the secret of that *tête-à-tête* had never transpired, and this made her very curious; so she was perpetually teasing me on the subject of Sholto Forster, and now Amy, probably taking the cue from her, attacked me upon it.

"Ah, by the bye, Mabel, what is become of the water dog? Has he been fishing in the fountains again and tumbled in?"

"Over head and ears," Mrs. Mainwaring said, "is it not so, Mabel? Well never mind, my dear, Brackenhurst is a charming place, and it will be very pleasant for the two sisters to live so near each other; one at Brackenhurst, and the other at Everleigh Court."

"I have a fancy Mabel would like a closer neighbourhood to Everleigh Court," Amy said, laughing.

"You are right, Amy," I replied, "I have no wish to leave my own home."

"My own village," she persisted maliciously, "my dear Mabel, don't look so innocent, we all know how fond you are of the Grange."

"But not of its master, I hope," Mrs. Mainwaring put in. "Mabel dear, that will be of no use; it is clear, Mr. Annesley is devoted to that little flighty ward of his, or at least, to her coffers."

"Any one who makes that remark, knows very little of Mr. Annesley," I replied, bristling up in his defence.

Both my tormentors laughed. "Ah, my dear, you don't know the world, that's evident," said one. "Poor Mabel! this is always a sore subject," remarked the other.

"And so you really would prefer that dismal old Grange to Brackenhurst!" Mrs. Mainwaring exclaimed, "and its pragmatical master to Sholto Forster, so clever and so charming as he is!"

I laughed outright. "Is it absolutely necessary that I should forthwith make my election?" I inquired, "or might I be allowed to look a little farther first? since of the two I have to choose between, one, you know as well as I do, is otherwise engaged, and the other does not shew any disposition to give me the opportunity."

But annoying as such conversations were sometimes, I was willing to put up with them, for the pleasure of having Amy at home again, and seeing my father's enjoyment of her society. Percy's

presence was the only drawback to this; it not only continually reminded him, perhaps, that she was no longer his own, but I could see that he actually disliked him. There was a kind of instinctive feeling, as it were, which made my father shrink from him, and it seemed to be always with an effort, that he shewed him any attention or even addressed him; yet nothing could exceed Percy's affection for his wife, or her fondness for him, and his manner was so cheerful and gay, that my father's unconquerable dislike was the more remarkable.

However, the fortnight passed over, and the Claytouns were obliged to return to Kington, and then we fell back into our former dullness, for such I am afraid it seemed then, even to me, though I did my best to keep up my own spirits and my father's. Philip was still with us, and my father was now thinking of placing him at College, or rather he had thought of it before, but now, perhaps, he felt strongly the necessity of something that would take him out of old habits; there were many hours, when parish work was over, that he used formerly to spend in his study, reading and writing, wholly absorbed in the occupation; he could not do that now. When not actively employed, he would fall into list-

lessness, and often on going into his room, I have found him sitting by the table, his head supported on his hand, and his eyes fixed dreamily on the fire. In the evening, too, he neither joined in conversation with Aunt Martha and myself, or opened the book which always lay on his little table, but would sit in the same attitude gazing into the fire; even music hardly roused him, and though, after Mr. Annesley had broken the ice as I mentioned before, I would often play and sing for a long time in the evening, he took little notice, only sometimes when I had ended, he would say with a sad smile, "thank you, my girl, that has been a great pleasure to me;" but more often he would sigh heavily, and express a wonder whether Amy kept up her music now.

It was, I think, the conciousness of this melancholy creeping over him, which made him anxious to give himself some occupation that would oblige him to fix his thoughts on present objects, and therefore he resolved to remove Philip from school, and as he could not go to Oxford before the Michaelmas term, he said he should read with him during the interval. It was a plan pleasing to us all; advantageous to my dear father, and still more so to Philip; for the former had the

benefit of his son's companionship, which, as Mr. Annesley was absent, was something to supply his place, and the latter gained a step in importance; besides the pleasure to the rest of the family circle. I was glad to see more of Philip, to have him join me in my walks, and to hear the cheerful sound of his voice or his whistle about the house; while dear Aunt Martha rejoiced, because she liked to see every one happy, and in her kind, unselfish way, even willingly submitted to the ransacking of her work-box—almost a daily misery inflicted upon her by Philip, when in search of materials for the many indescribable contrivances, essential to the happiness of a youth of his age—for the sake of seeing my father and myself in the enjoyment of his society.

But there was another idea in my mind connected with the idea of Philip's leaving school. The comparison of ages was a ladder, by the aid of which I mounted up to the fact, that there were but two more years before Edith would be of age, and not only mistress in full of Calvers, but arrived at the period when, if she fulfilled her father's wishes, she would become the wife of Mr. Annesley.

I would have given much to be able to divine what her decision would be. It was so difficult

to form an opinion of what her feelings were; they seemed so very childish, that I never could satisfy myself whether she loved him as—as in fact he ought to be loved, or whether only as her guardian. Sometimes I thought it was the latter, while yet a secret misgiving told me that "the wish was father to the thought;" there were so many things that led me to the other conclusion.

I did not think she had penetration enough to look beneath the surface in any case; and though once, a glimmering of her having read my secret, when she entered into her own history, crossed my mind, it soon passed away, and I became more and more convinced that she did that, only to relieve her mind of the uneasiness that had haunted her, since the little scene between her and her guardian at Brackenhurst, on Clarence's account. That very uneasiness told a tale which jarred unpleasantly on my mental ear, for girls are not usually apt to fret inconveniently over the recollection of having taunted 'Gardie' with what they know is disagreeable to him.

Of three things I felt certain, that let the feelings of Mr. Annesley be what they might, and I did not dare to examine very accurately into them, he would not hurry her into a decision; that the possession of Calvers, whatever Mrs. Mainwaring might say,

would have no weight with him; and that unless she had had opportunities of choosing elsewhere, and shewed a very marked preference for himself, he would use no undue influence to obtain her.

As to opportunities, indeed, it was not likely that such would be wanting, where beauty and wealth were both in the scale. Rumours had often reached us that admirers were plenty, but no one seemed yet to have been successful in displacing her father's choice.

I don't think Mrs. Mainwaring liked Edith, for in speaking of her, she generally affixed some disparaging adjective to her name; but yet she took a great pleasure in coming to me with tales of the conquests she made, and the admiration she excited, and her apparent indifference to all, generally ending with, "Ah, my dear, that guardian of her's knows very well what he's about."

One day, long after the Claytouns had left us, indeed it was early in March, she paid us one of her frequent visits, with a more than usually triumphant air; I expected fully that she had something to communicate which she supposed would be stinging to me, and was not deceived. After glancing over a variety of subjects, she turned suddenly from Aunt Martha, and address-

ing me, said, with a sort of chuckle: "So, Mabel, you have lost your chance of Brackenhurst?"

"If ever I had any," I replied coolly.

"Yes, you are right there, if ever you had any," she repeated. "Sholto Forster's at Rome."

"It is a dangerous place for a young man to be in, without some one to guide him," dear Aunt Martha remarked.

"Oh, he is in no want of a guide, dear Mrs. Stanley," Mrs. Mainwaring said, laughing at my good aunt's simplicity. "Besides the charming Edith, Mr. Annesley's there, and he is enough to guide the whole world, with the Papal court into the bargain, is he not, Mabel?"

I observed that I knew the Annesleys were wintering there.

"Yes, and I hear that Sholto is the shadow of the piquante little heiress; not that he wants money, you know, with such a property as Brackenhurst, but that now he really is in love."

I said I hoped his love would have a happy termination; and, indeed, with more sincerity than I cared for Mrs. Mainwaring to know.

"Ah well, my dear, that I can't say," she answered, "you know Edith is closely watched, and Dame Margaret doubtless lost no time in apprizing Gardie of the danger. I thought he was

in a great hurry to run away after Christmas."

"I don't think he would thwart Edith if she really had a preference for Mr. Forster, or any one else," I remarked.

"Don't you, my dear?" was the answering question, accompanied by a provoking laugh. "Poor Mabel."

She little thought if her tale about Sholto Forster were true, how far I was from standing in need of her pity. But I did not believe it, and indeed, it was not long before we had another call from her, and this time the story was changed.

"Well, my dear, Edith Marsh has refused Sholto Forster, so Gardie's chance is not over yet; but they say he, I mean Sholto, is in a dreadful state, for he really was in love with her; it was no mere flirtation this time."

"And Mr. Annesley was the cruel guardian, I suppose?" I said, with a faint smile.

"No, my dear, I hear it all took place during Mr. Annesley's absence; and when he returned from some little excursion he had been making with a friend, his rival had quitted the field."

"Then at least Edith pleased herself?" Aunt Martha suggested.

"Yes, I suppose so," was the answer in a dissatisfied tone, "and yet she might have had her instructions beforehand. I am just come from Brackenhurst; they were all horribly annoyed, I could see, though they thought me quite in the dark, and were very close; but I was determined to let them know I was not utterly blind—so I quietly said, I had heard from a friend of mine at Rome, who had met Sholto one day at the Annesley's, and heard him planning all manner of things, and next day, to the astonishment of my friend, he had left Rome! I could see Mrs. Forster's pride was touched, as well as Miss Bella's, but I had just given them to understand that I knew all about it, and then I took my leave that they might digest the idea at leisure."

And with the same benevolent intention towards us, or rather towards myself probably, she got up as she spoke, and saying that she had not seen Mrs. Aubrey for an age, and must positively call at the Knoll before going home, she shook hands and departed.

"Mrs. Mainwaring is really very good natured," was dear Aunt Martha's comment, as soon as the sound of her silk dress had died away, "but do you know, Mabel, I always fancy she manages to

hit upon subjects that are disagreeable to her friends."

Dear simple Aunt Martha! were you thinking of Mrs. Forster, or myself, I wonder.

CHAPTER V.

" 'Tis ever thus! by toil and pain,
And cumbrous cost, we strive to gain
Some seeming prize, whose issues lie
In darkness and futurity."

HEBER.

YES, it was not to be denied that Amy's absence did make a great blank in our household.

She was always so merry and so gay; one heard her sweet voice at all times, singing joyously as she went about the house, or sat over her work. She had a cheerful word for every one, she could even win a laugh from old Phœbe in the midst of her household affairs, and that was a triumph indeed, for Phœbe did not set about these in the light, off-hand manner of servants of the present day; she belonged to a generation of which there are but few specimens remaining. The most trifling matter was undertaken by her in a serious spirit, as done unto God and not unto man; and to laugh and jest over such things was

quite contrary to her old world notions; but even she could not entirely resist the contagion of Amy's good-humoured mirth; and in spite of all her endeavours, and half angry remarks, it always ended in her giving way to a hearty laugh.

I was so different; none of that light gaiety belonged to me; I was shy, and liked to go my own quiet way; not morose or unhappy, but I could never have exhibited the buoyancy of spirit that Amy did, and though I did often sing to myself, it was in an under breath if at home, or else as I sat upon the cliffs, and mingled my voice with the roar of the waves. I could enjoy mirth in others, and even rise to their pitch if drawn on, but could not generate it myself. I loved study and thought, and from having been always a secondary object at home, I had formed the habit of indulging those tastes and seeking solitude.

I knew then, how grievously my father must feel the loss of his bright Amy, and I strove hard to supply her place; but alas! gaiety of manner, was never yet attained by endeavour, so I was obliged to sink back to my natural habits, and only try by kindness, watchfulness, and a true affection, to make up for what was wanting in animation. My father seemed to understand my feelings, and accepted my services with kindness

and allowance; but yet I could see that they were only accepted, not valued or loved, and I felt that my trial was a hard one; and used to wonder sometimes, whether there were in my nature a more than ordinary impatience and selfishness, which had to be subdued thus, as it were, by perpetual pressure; or whether it were, indeed, a training needful for the part in life I should be called upon to act, or rather suffer.

So the winter and summer passed away; neither Miss Annesley nor Edith came to the Grange; they were in England only for a short time, and that was spent at Calvers. Edith indeed wrote, and asked me to visit her there, but I could not leave my father now; even though Aunt Martha and Philip were with him; I felt that, little as I could do for him, he must not lose both his girls. Of course Edith could not be made to comprehend this; what had that gay humming-bird to do with duties? all her's were but pleasures, she could not see that they must sometimes be associated with pain. She was so desirous, too, she wrote, to shew me Calvers, she was now twenty, and Gardie told her that in another year his charge would expire, and she would have to live there, and manage the property herself, and do all manner of disagreeable things that she had not the slightest idea of doing; and

she felt so overwhelmed at the prospect, that she wanted me to come, so that she might study my grave, quiet ways, and try to imitate them and grow important.

Once the fancy had struck her that spectacles would add dignity to her appearance, and she had actually bought a pair and put them on one morning; but happening to meet the butler in the hall, he had assumed such a ludicrous expression, between the inclination to laugh, and the desire to preserve a respectful gravity, that her own had been quite overset, and she had neither ventured to appear before Gardie in them nor to tell him of her attempt. However, her maid had orders to make her up some dark, sober coloured dresses, such as she had seen good homely looking dames of domestic habits wear, and she was endeavouring to attain the art of walking, instead of running, and to break herself of jumping the few last stairs as she came down.

One thing, however, militated sadly against steadiness of demeanour. She had got the most charming little Skye terrier, who could do every trick that dog was capable of, and was the most engaging of his race; so that if, by a happy chance, she succeeded in attaining a due degree of decorum in gait and manner, Mingo was sure to discompose it all. Not

that the dog belonged to her, she went on, it was Clarence Aubrey's; she believed she had told me that Clarence had spent a day or two at Calvers on his way to Alverstoke ten days ago. He was greatly perplexed what to do with Mingo, as the Earl would not hear of having a dog in the house, and Mingo had been such a pet and companion, that he could not bear to think of his being turned into a common kennel with other dogs—so at last Edith said, she had offered to keep the dog till he should claim him again, and now she was so delighted with his clever ways, that she almost hoped he would forget where he had left him.

"Not much chance of that," I thought, as I fell into musing over the clever way in which Clarence had kept his promise to me, and yet carried out his own intention. The letter, indeed, set me thinking upon many things. I wondered how this Calvers establishment was to be arranged, for it was not very probable that the lively little chatelaine's spirit would be broken, by the weight of the one additional year yet wanting to complete her load. Miss Annesley, who could not winter at the Grange, was not likely to be able to brave that season in a county so much more northern. Would there be a duenna brought in? one of the Calvers cousins Edith had spoken of, to sit and

spin, and play propriety in the chimney-corner? or would all these difficulties, so hard to unravel, be cut short by the guardian merging into the husband? I read over the letter more carefully, and thought I could discover indications of such a change.

From time to time, there peeped out a sort of exulting self-gratulation that this solitary state would not last long, and after some casual mention of "Gardie" came the question, "How shall I learn to call him by another name?" While in the postscript came a more pertinent remark:

"Heigh ho! dear old Gardie is so afraid of taking advantage of the request papa made, and yet—When is leap-year, Mabel? be sure you answer me this."

I had letters from Ruth, too, and an earnest invitation to Alverstoke. She remembered the short time I had stayed there, with such great pleasure, she said, her father liked me so much, and wished almost equally with herself, that I would visit them again, and *she* was in some trouble too; for the Earl was so urgent with her to marry, and Clarence seemed too well satisfied with the present state of things to wish for a change; sometimes she even thought that he was not a willing party to the engagement; and indeed she had all her life been

so accustomed to be idolized, that she thought she should never be fit for a wife. Clarence evidently considered her cold, but she had acquired such a habit of receiving devotion, that probably she expected more than any one would be disposed to give, and she begun to fear that she was a selfish, exacting person; and, in short, was vexed and harrassed, wanted help, and had no friend or neighbour to turn to. "No one in the world, dear Mabel, after papa, in whom I can confide, except yourself; so do come and cheer me, and tell if I am right in the resolution I am inclined to adopt." And then came a postscript to Ruth's letter. "That dear, merry little humming-bird, as you call her, Edith Marsh, is at Calvers I hear, and going to live there now; how I wish I could be more like her!"

Poor Ruth! I would willingly have complied with her wish to see me, though the invitation to Calvers had been no temptation; for in spite of all Edith's pretty ways and coaxings, I still thought her very inferior to Ruth, both in character and disposition. But the same cause which prevented my going to one, operated equally against my accepting the other invitation, and besides what advice or comfort could I give? I had heard Clarence express his indifference, or more, to his cousin, and his preference for Edith: could I persuade her to

consent to the Earl's wish, when I knew it would be destruction to her own happiness? She too, who, as she justly said, would require more than ordinary devotion and tenderness from a husband probably. What a strange cross world this is! I exclaimed. How few obtain what they really desire, and even if they do, how few find the happiness they looked for! Among five people who are in my mind at this moment, only one, and that Edith, has almost every wish of her heart fulfilled; and she sighs from excess of bliss. What a pity Mr. Annesley and Clarence cannot change places. Ruth would suit the former exactly; that is—I corrected myself—far better than Edith; and I think Edith would like Clarence, or indeed any one else quite as well, for she has very little heart.

I forget whether I did answer Edith's question as to leap-year; there was no occasion to do so at all events, as I knew very well.

As the summer went on and August drew to a close, I was aroused from such speculations by the realities of life. Intelligence came of Amy's confinement and the birth of twin boys. Dear Aunt Martha was quite disconcerted by the news, I can see her now—as my father came to tell us, with the letter in his hand, looking more like what he was a year ago than I had seen him since Amy's

marriage—laying down her work and looking up at him over her spectacles, with a face of unmistakeable dismay, while she lifted the hand that rested on the table, and ejaculated, "Dear, dear, dear!" However, the expression in my father's face somewhat reassured her. He indeed seemed delighted at the event, though perhaps even he would have been content with a more measured blessing; however, a grandchild or rather grandchildren, and those Amy's, gave him, for a time, a new interest in life; and all the sorrow she had caused him seemed forgotten in the joy of the moment.

In the fullness of his content he insisted upon going to Everleigh Court, to wish old Mr. Claytoun joy, and receive his congratulations on the occasion. It was a thing he had not done since the marriage, for Mr. Claytoun strongly resented Amy's having married his son, so there had been little communication since, between the families, and that little, of the most formal description.

There were many reasons, therefore, why this determination of my father's distressed me. Besides the doubt as to the reception his good wishes would meet with from the proud old banker, it showed a painful change in himself. It was not that I wished him to meet pride with

pride; but I felt sure that, had his mind retained all its former vigour, he would not have suffered an almost childish exultation in the birth of Amy's children, to place him in a situation where he might be likely to meet with insult. He wished me to accompany him, and much as I disliked the errand, I was too glad to receive even that trivial mark of his affection, to make any objection. Had Mr. Annesley been at home, his clear good sense, and deep respect, even love for my father, would have at once shewn him the inadvisibility of the step, I felt sure, and he would also have known how to influence, without seeming to thwart him. But alas! he was not at the Grange, the gloom there had long predominated over the sunshine, and the changeful April had settled down into the dark November.

So we went, my father and myself, to Everleigh Court next day, and painful as the visit had been in the anticipation, the reality exceeded it. My dear, good father's simple expressions of his happiness at the birth of these two children, and his hopes that they would prove a bond of union between our families, and all past unpleasantness might be forgotten, were met by the cold, haughty assurance of the Miss Claytoun's, that they were glad such an event gave him pleasure,

but for their own part, they did not think Mrs. Percy Claytoun had shewn, as a daughter, such admirable qualities as would lead any one to look for those that were desirable in a wife and a mother. I was deeply grieved for my dear father, and glad to see that the insulting cruel words roused his spirit, instead of crushing it as I had feared; indeed I was hardly prepared for the calm, quiet dignity with which he said, as he rose to take leave—that he had hoped the recent event might have given the families a common interest in the welfare of the young couple; he had himself reason to lament the step his daughter had taken certainly, not only because it had deprived him of the society of one who was so very dear to him, but because he feared, from common report, that the character of her husband was such as made it likely to end in her own misery. I thought the young ladies looked rather abashed, for their brother's wildness was too well known to be denied; but they made no answer, except by a haughty bend as we left the room, and I was glad that we were at least spared an encounter with the banker. But it gave my father a shock from which he did not soon recover, and for a time he fell back into all his former listless melancholy.

A motive for fresh exertion, however, occurred

soon in the necessity for taking Philip to Oxford. He spent a few days there among some of the old acquaintances of his earlier days, and this revival of former friendships cheered him wonderfully. He had a source of great satisfaction too in Philip, whose character was gradually developing itself very favourably, and I begun to hope that the comfort he was likely to experience from Philip, would counteract the sorrow which Amy's conduct had occasioned him.

As he returned from Oxford, he went a little out of his way to see the Percy Claytouns, and especially his grandchildren; I don't think altogether that visit increased his happiness, though he said little about it. Aunt Martha was very eager to hear all particulars on his return, but though ready to expatiate on the beauty of the children, and Amy's pride and pleasure in displaying them, he did not mention Percy, and seemed very thoughtful; I imagine he must have heard or seen something, which gave him reason to fear that marriage had not made him steadier than he was before. How often I wished for Mr. Annesley now! he would have been such a comfort to my father. With his moderate opinion of me, it was not to be expected that he would give me his confidence, and yet how I yearned to gain it! not that I was

presumptuous enough to suppose, either that I could have advised, or that my father could have relied on my judgment, but the very fact of sharing the trouble that was consuming his heart, might have lessened it. I used to try, and lead to subjects that I knew harrassed and distressed him, but the only answer I could obtain was a deep sigh; so I was obliged to content myself with tending him, and doing in a quiet unobtrusive way all that the fondest love could suggest; for indeed I did love him tenderly, sometimes I thought more than Amy did, but I know that was wrong, and besides, untrue; I had not had the same trial as Amy, in her place I might have acted at least no better.

It was a dull Christmas that year, do what we would to make it seem otherwise. Amy could not come to us, because the children were too young to travel at such a season, and our greatest pleasure was in making up a basket of good and useful things to send to Kington, packing them so that each little parcel would occasion a new surprise, and fancying the arrival of the hamper on Christmas Eve.

Philip's return was a great comfort: even the very short time that had elapsed since he left us, seemed to have worked an improvement in

him. He had quite thrown by the wild school-boy, and I began to look upon him in the light of one who could be an adviser and helper. From him I heard, what my father could not probably bring himself to speak of, namely that Percy, whose addiction to play had before this led him into difficulties, was by no means cured of it.

He did not think Amy was aware of his inclination, and at present there was no diminution of their happiness, but the prospect was not cheering.

We used to walk up and down the green terrace at the Grange, when the weather permitted, or sit together in the library, and give way to forebodings and fears, which we anxiously checked, and concealed under a semblance of cheerfulness when in my father's presence.

"And so Edith Marsh is to be mistress here one day, as well as at Calvers," Philip exclaimed, in one of our visits to the old spot, "I wonder how long it will retain its appearance of antiquity under such an order of things."

"I don't imagine the Grange is sufficiently in accordance with her taste, to induce her to reside here much," I answered.

"That will be a pity, Mabel, for you have few companions, and it would be pleasant to have

her and Mr. Annesley for such near neighbours."

"Pleasant? oh dear no!" I exclaimed, with unwonted vehemence I suppose, for Philip looked at me in amazement, as he said,

"Why, I thought you and Edith were such friends, Mabel?"

"Friend is such a misused term," I replied; "to be a friend requires to have gone through some trial of the relation, to have made some sacrifices; and yet the merest acquaintance claims to be called a friend."

"I thought you had made some sacrifices for Edith," he answered; "I remember a long illness when you gave up your home and the delightful society of your brother, to be her nurse night and day; surely there was friendship in that, Mabel!"

"Oh, but that was not—" I begun, and then I stopped hesitating, "I mean that I would do anything for Edith Marsh, not because I esteem her as a friend, but because she is dear to Mr. Annesley, and he is one of my best, perhaps my *very* best friend," I went on.

"Well, I should have thought Edith had charms enough in herself to secure your friend-

ship," Philip said, "she seems a most engaging little person."

"I believe she is a witch," I exclaimed, petulantly I am sure, for I felt vexed with her, and with Philip, and myself, and all the world. "Every body sings the praises of Edith Marsh, and is ready to fall at her feet, and for my part I—," once more I stopped for a moment, and then changing my tone, I continued—"I am very unjust I believe!"

"Why, Mabel," Philip said, laughingly, "one would think you were jealous of Edith, to hear you talk; and yet I should much rather have expected Lady Ruth Aubrey to have been an object of jealousy."

"How silly you are, Philip! you are no better than Mrs. Mainwaring and the rest of the world. Why should I be jealous of any one? though," I added, correcting myself, "I believe you are not altogether wrong; I am jealous of Edith, as mistress of this dear old Grange, which has given me so much happiness, and even deserted and sad as it is now, is dearer to me than any other spot in the world. I know she will not appreciate it, and yet it will no longer be mine; the dear old Grange!" I repeated, looking round me.

"That even in sorrow looks sweet,"

Philip quoted, with a laugh, "but don't you see Mabel, that if Edith does not care for it, and lives at Calvers, it will be more than ever yours?"

"Mr. Annesley would never consent to forsake it for Calvers," I replied. "He is too fond, too proud of it; but it is foolish to talk thus. The present is ours, we must trust and hope for the future, instead of talking so gloomily on the last day of your stay with us, Philip, which I intended should pass without a cloud."

"It has not been a very heavy one, Mabel," he observed, "and at least we have brought in some of our neighbours to share the gloom with us."

"Yes, indeed, we have been arranging their proceedings something in Mrs. Mainwaring's style," I answered, laughing, as we passed through the Lodge gates.

"Ah, that odious Mrs. Mainwaring; how it excruciates every nerve in one's body to hear her talk of her neighbours, and their affairs, and a hundred other things that she knows no more about than that magpie chattering over our heads; and yet she is sometimes wonderfully good-natured and amusing, and makes one laugh in spite of oneself," Philip said.

"And there she is, going out of the Rectory gate, towards her own home!" I exclaimed. "Happily she does not see us, or we should be overwhelmed with condolences on the subject of papa, interspersed with praises of the wonderful filial devotion of the son and daughter of the Duke of Lackland, who never think of leaving their father now that he is so unwell."

"Meaning," added Philip, "to shew the great contrast presented by the unnatural conduct of Mabel and Philip Willoughby."

"Exactly so," I replied; "depend upon it, she has been trying to infuse some such poison into dear Aunt Martha's mind, and the good soul is far too upright and simple to understand her meaning, and agrees fully with her that the Duke must be singularly happy in his children. Mrs. Mainwaring never can make any impression upon Aunt Martha, she is so straightforward."

This time, however, I was far from right in my conjectures; for we had not been the subject of Mrs. Mainwaring's ambiguous praises, and she had really succeeded in ruffling my aunt's mind. Amy had been the theme of her discourse. What a sweet creature she was, how fond my father was of her, and no wonder! and how her marriage must have grieved him; it was quite enough to

have occasioned his present state of health, though she hoped Amy would never know that, of course it would make her so miserable.

But she hoped and trusted that she would be very happy, though Percy was dreadfully wild and fond of play, she had heard, but that might never interfere with their domestic comfort, or make him unkind to his wife; he had always been a source of misery to his father, but prudent and steady as Amy had shewn herself, no doubt she would reclaim him, and he would become quite a reformed character now. Her maid had indeed heard from her sister, who was the wife of a serjeant in the regiment, that they were living very fast indeed; but now that she was a mother, and of twins too, she was quite sure they would be careful not to run into debt any more; Amy was such a dear creature, she was so interested in her, and indeed in all the family.

CHAPTER VI.

"That awful pitiless sea,
With all its terror and mystery,
The dim, dark sea, so like unto death,
That divides and yet unites mankind."

LONGFELLOW.

PHILIP had been gone about two months, and we were even then beginning to look forward to the pleasure of seeing him again. There was a rumour, too, that Mr. Annesley was coming to the Grange.

One day, early in March, that I went there, I found Fenton full of business putting the gardens in trim order, and the housekeeper equally active within. I thought the whole family must be expected, from the unusual note of preparation which was being sounded throughout; but on inquiry, it seemed, that "Master" only was coming at present, Miss Annesley was afraid to en-

counter the east winds of our coast; but the place had been deserted so long, that much was needful to give it the ordinary habitable appearance; and the blaze of fires in all parts of the house, made the old place seem to smile again.

I did not quite understand why all this was required now, more than at other times, for Mrs. Wilson kept the house always in such perfect order, and so thoroughly aired, that it would have been difficult to find a cobweb, and impossible to discover any sign of damp about it; but perhaps it was only a mode of expressing her pleasure at the master's return. "Though from what she could make out," she said, "he did not intend remaining more than a few days; and she supposed he was going to make some alterations, for he had directed her to order the carpenter to take measure of the different rooms before he came.

"I met Mrs. Mainwaring, as I was going to Turner's house, Miss," Mrs. Wilson went on, "and when she heard what my errand was, she said, 'perhaps master intended selling the place, for now that he was going to marry Miss Edith, it was not likely that he would live here any more.' I suppose Mrs. Mainwaring is likely to know, Miss, but I can hardly think so myself. It's not for me to speak of Miss Edith, though indeed I've no

wish to have her mistress here; but it would break my heart to see the old place in other hands. I and my mother, and my grandmother before me, Miss, have been housekeeper here, and I love the place and the family as if they were my own, and my dear kind master too; I think too, it would go as hard with him as with any of us, to part with the old Grange, which he has always been so fond of."

I could not believe it either, and was not one whit more inclined to do so on Mrs. Mainwaring's authority; nevertheless, when the good old housekeeper, lifting the corner of her apron, wiped away the tears that were running down her honest cheeks, I could not resist the misgiving that came over me, and could readily have sat down and wept with her. But I would not yield to this feeling, so I said, with a cheerful air,

"Never mind, Mrs. Wilson, I have no fear that Mr. Annesley will let the Grange go to strangers, or that your daughter Rachel, who is at this moment using the broom so vigorously, will not one day take your place in the housekeeper's room. It is much more likely that he is thinking of putting down new carpets, which, indeed, you must own, have been wanting long enough."

I spoke more confidently than I felt at the

moment, but the very endeavour to reassure the old lady, seemed to bring to my own mind belief in the assertion I had made.

"Well, I see it is quite vain now to hope for my old quiet corner in the library, Mrs. Wilson," I added, "therefore I will not stand in your way. It will gladden the hearts of the old Griffiths to hear Mr. Annesley is expected; I will walk there this afternoon, it is so bright, and the days are getting so gloriously long now, that one can take a good walk."

"If I might make bold, Miss, and you really are going to the Griffiths," Mrs. Wilson said, "perhaps you would take this little parcel to them, Master sent it a day or two ago, but we have been so busy no one has had time to go so far."

I took the parcel gladly; it gave me a decided object for the walk, which always enhances the pleasure; without such an inducement, indeed, it requires often more resolution than one can at all times summon, to set out for a lonely walk. My love of flowers and nature would, in the summer, constantly beguile me into the fields and woods, and my sea-shore studies would do the same at almost all seasons, but having an object stronger than mere self-gratification, often converts what without that

would be perhaps only a desultory stroll, into a brisk and healthful walk.

It was so on that bright March afternoon, when, with the sun shedding already a warmer and more golden tint over the landscape, and many hours of daylight yet before me, I started on my errand. I had time at my own disposal, too, for my father was gone to dine with the Bishop; and as there was to be a meeting of the clergy next day on some diocesan business, he intended sleeping at Winterford, whither my aunt had accompanied him. I had, therefore, made a luncheon dinner, with the view of spending my solitary afternoon at the Grange.

With what a joyous feeling did I set out on my walk to the old fisherman's! I could hardly account for the unusual buoyancy of my spirits, certainly Mrs. Wilson's forebodings were not likely to have raised their tone; but it might be the effect of the preparations for the arrival of Mr. Annesley. From whatever cause, I felt an unusual elasticity; and for some way I ran and bounded along, rather than walked. When I reached the top of the Down, and looked seaward over the cliff, however, a new fancy struck me. I saw by the receding of the water, that it was the highest spring tide of the year, and would be consequently

the lowest ebb; there being therefore no occasion for me to hurry home, I might return by the beach at my leisure; and as it would not be low water, I knew, till somewhere about six, I should have a delightful opportunity for a search among the tide pools, down to the very extremity of the "little-rocks."

So I walked slowly onward, revolving a variety of subjects in my mind; hoping my father would enjoy himself in the society he would be in this afternoon; wishing he could be induced to mingle in it more frequently, as he used to do; wondering whether he would ever recover from the terrible blow which had so prostrated him. Then that led me off to Amy, and brought to my mind what had often perplexed me—the strange unconsciousness she shewed of having in any way grieved or disappointed my father; and her determination, almost, not to see that he was changed.

I thought over what Philip had said, and Mrs. Mainwaring had insinuated, about Percy; and though that lady's tales, coming as they did generally through her own and other people's servants, did not deserve implicit faith perhaps, they had the quality, peculiar to all she said, of leaving behind a sting, like the prickles of the cactus, too minute to be seen, but so sharp as to occasion

much pain, and even frequently to fester. It was probably the train of thought which these subjects led to, that depressed me; but somehow my wild joy gradually changed to deep sadness. Even the bright glancing sunbeams, sparkling on the crests of the wavelets below, and the smiling aspect of the whole scene, failed to restore my former gaiety; and when at length I rose from the cliff where I had seated myself, and pursued my walk, it was with a heavy heart and a slow step.

I believe the old couple thought me the bearer of bad news, they looked at me so anxiously as I entered, but the tidings of Mr. Annesley's return, and the sight of the packet, soon reassured them. The prospect, indeed, of seeing the master again, seemed to outweigh every other consideration, and in the wayward, changeful mood I was in, my spirits were soon infected by the gaiety of theirs, and the gloom of the past was again forgotten in the brightness of the future.

"It's the lowest tide we shall have this season, Adam," I said, as I left the cottage, "and I mean to have an evening of shelling and fishing as I go home."

"Yes, Miss," the old man answered, as he stood at the cottage door, and looked landward, and seaward, and then up at the sky overhead, as

if it were an open book in which he was reading. "The tide will be running out till nigh six, but you'd best not linger when it has turned to-night. There's a bank of dirty looking clouds down in the east there, and it's like we shall have a roughish night of it, for all the sky looks so bright now. It'll be the highest spring tide too, and it's an inshore wind."

"No need to fear for me, Adam," I said, springing down the wooden steps that led from his cottage to the beach. "I will not fail to keep a sharp look out, and you know I am an expert clamberer."

Never was there a more tempting expanse of smooth sand and rugged rock displayed before a marine naturalist's eye, than I gazed over as I stood upon the beach. It was considerably after five when I left the cottage, so I resolved to go as far as possible out to sea, that I might examine places which were not uncovered by the water more than once or twice in the year, and would soon be reclaimed.

For some time I went on very prudently, retiring step by step as the tide advanced, and not too much absorbed in my occupation to forget Adam's caution; but by degrees I became bolder, or rather, more careless. I had now left the ex-

treme end of the sunken rocks, and was busily searching a hollow in those nearest the shore, which went by the name of the Pear-bath, from its peculiar form. The sun had long set, but the influence of the full moon made the waning of the daylight almost imperceptible. At all events, I was so buried in the depths of the bath, that I had not observed it, revelling as I was in the bank of shells and seaweeds rich and rare, which the morning's tide had deposited, and heedless of aught beyond; when suddenly, with a roar like thunder, a huge wave broke into, and surged up to the very head of the bath.

I started up from my crouching posture in consternation, and waited for a moment, expecting to see the water recede again; but to my horror, it maintained the ground it had gained; and now wave after wave of smaller calibre followed, and the water stood above my ancles before I could obtain sufficient footing on the slippery sides, covered as they were with wet seaweed, to make my escape. At last I stood on the platform of rock just above, and looked around in horror and despair for a moment. I was quite sufficiently acquainted with the tide marks, to know that once that Pear-bath had a covering of water, all chance of retreat from behind the rocks was pretty well

cut off. The bluff headland that separated me from Adam's cottage, I knew, must have a foot or two of water round its base now, and I might as well attempt to reach the moon, as to scale its steep, lofty sides; that ledge of rock, which I mentioned having climbed over on a former occasion, by no means for the first time, might possibly without much risk be passed now; but it was a quarter of a mile off, and those who know what it is to run that distance over sand and slippery rocks, will easily conceive that the hope of reaching it in time was a forlorn one.

However, I did not stop to weigh chances, but started off at my best speed. And now I found Adam's prognostications right; a strong inshore wind had risen with the tide, and as the waves advanced, it blew fiercer and fiercer, driving them before it, and dashing them with fury upon the land. The bank of clouds was fast overspreading the sky, and all day-light was entirely gone; only a pale glimmer from the moon, herself invisible, saved it from utter darkness. Still I continued to run, making head against the wind, and avoiding the bunches of wet sea-weed that lay in my way, as well as I could, while the roar of waters, the dashing of the breakers on the shore, and the noise of the wind

as it drove the spray furiously onwards, were almost deafening.

At last I reached the rock; but oh, horror! the waves were washing its base, and the spray falling in showers over its summit. Still I did not quite give up; one chance yet remains, I thought; when that huge wave, which I see advancing, breaks, it will in the recess run far back, leaving but little water behind it, then with a firm and active step, I may perhaps do what I have done ere this, chase it as it retreats, and round the rock before another wave comes up. It was a chance, the only one that remained, and anxiously I stood watching the progress of the huge monster, as it rose and fell, and in every undulation seemed to gain fresh volume. At last it threw its vast bulk forward, and was dashed to pieces on the rock before it.

Now! I thought, and with a desperate determination, I was collecting my forces to follow the receding wave, and so make my escape. But I had not calculated on the power of the wind; the water had only begun to draw away from the rock, when another wave, almost as large as that which had preceded it, rushed up, and flung itself still farther forward on to the ledge of rock. The water was now knee deep round the point, and to attempt to cross the ledge would have

been certain destruction, from the size of the waves, and the terrible force with which they dragged everything after them in their retreat, while the fury of the wind made it difficult to stand even where I was.

The utter horror and helplessness of my position now stared me full in the face, and for a moment entirely subdued me. I threw myself down upon the sand, and in that forlorn instant, my whole life seemed to pass before me. All the joys and sorrows I had known, the good and evil I had done, the familiar faces of those I loved so dearly—all crowded into my recollection with startling clearness, during that moment of time, as I have seen a wide landscape, or a large building, reflected in a small globe of silvered glass; and burying my face in the sand, I yielded to the anguish of my feelings, and groaned.

But I was not one to abandon myself supinely to despair, and at that moment too, the words "The waves of the sea are mighty, and rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier," seemed to flash like light into my mind. I rose from the beach and looked round me, as well as I could for the gloom and the blinding spray, to see if it were possible to find any kind of safety during the next few hours.

What a fearful sight it was! and how utterly desolate and forlorn I felt! It would be difficult to say which element is the more terrific; whether fire, as it leaps with life-like rapidity from object to object, laughing, as it were, with a wild joy at the destruction it is causing; or water, as I saw it then, when the sea, lashed into madness, comes rushing onwards, rearing its huge, foam-crested waves on high, and flinging them with irresistible power on to the shore, tearing up the stones and sand in their recess, with a force nothing can withstand.

Not that such thoughts entered my mind at that miserable moment, I was too much occupied with the present danger, which my own folly had brought me into, and the best mode of escaping from it, if that were possible. There was, however, one gleam of comfort which darted through all my agony even then; the recollection that whatever the result might be, my father and aunt were at least spared present anxiety.

The wind blew more and more furiously, and the heavy clouds and light wrack were chased rapidly across the sky, sometimes completely obscuring the moon, and then giving a momentary glimpse of her pale, shorn disk. Still there was always sufficient light to enable me to distinguish objects, though the deafening roar of the waves,

and the tumult of the wind bewildered me, and effectually prevented any other sound being heard. I knew that the tide, urged on by such a gale, would wash the base of the cliffs, and perhaps go even higher, so that, unless I could find some means of clambering above their reach, inevitable death was before me. Just where the cliffs were steepest, were some broken steps, called the Smuggler's Steps, cut in the face of the rock, and leading to the top of the cliff. It was a frightfully giddy place, but I had ascended them with Philip when we were children; I sought them now; but time and the action of the weather, had so entirely destroyed the lower part, that it was utterly beyond my utmost endeavours to reach the first step.

Once more then I yielded to despair, and sitting down, as close to the foot of the rock as I could creep, I determined, with a quiet resolution, to await the advance of the waves. I was wet through and through with the spray, which flew in some places to the very summit of the cliffs; and as I crouched down upon the loose sand, I shivered and shook, partly with cold, and partly with an agony, which could not be called fear, and would have been despair, but for a strange, unaccountable feeling of almost hope, as, through all the turmoil around me, I seemed to hear the music

of those words, "The waves of the sea are mighty, and rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier." It was as if some sweet voice chaunted them in my ear, and they seemed to fall in with the hissing, metallic cadence of the waves, as they broke and rushed wildly back, carrying the sand and shingle away with them.

I could not pray, my mind was too much like the tempest-tossed sea before me; but I listened to those sweet words, and they seemed to give me hope and confidence.

Never can I forget the wonderful sublimity of the scene, though at the time I was not conscious of anything but its horror.

The dark, boiling, seething water, with its fringe of silver, fitfully lighted by the pale glare of the misty moon; and the huge waves as they came thundering onward, rushing, and leaping, and seeking, as in a race, to overtake each other. Sometimes two mighty ones, driven by opposing currents, would meet before they reached the shore, and breaking against each other, fling up volumes of foam and spray, while others were often caught by the wind before they could rear their wild crests, and forced onward in a shower of spray which deluged me with water, while the gale howled, and whistled, and screamed above and

around me. It was a fearful night, of which it would be equally impossible either to lose the remembrance, or clearly to detail all the horrors.

Once, I thought I saw a black object at some distance out upon the waves. The light was so fitful and imperfect, that though I strained my eyes till they ached again, I could not distinguish anything clearly. I fancied the sound of voices was borne upon the wind, and I shrieked at the utmost pitch of my own voice, but what could a feeble sound like that avail, against such a tumult of the elements? It was blown back upon the rock behind me and absorbed; and when I looked upon that terrific surf, I knew no boat could make the shore even if my eyes had not deceived me; I closed them for a minute, and when I looked again, nothing was visible. Had it then been merely my fancy, I thought, or had the mad waves engulphed the gallant crew, whoever they might be? and at that moment the roar of the waves and wind seemed to combine, and whisper the word "Annesley!" For a moment, I bowed my head and covered my eyes with my hand, as the name seemed syllabled to my ear, but the next I threw the wild thought from me, for I knew he was far away.

There were no means of calculating time, save

by the advance of the tide, and owing to the fury of the gale, it would be high water probably even before eleven, or very soon after. It could not want much of that hour, for even now the waves reached to my feet; the foaming fringe of that last, touched them! Another such a huge one, and I must be drawn back with the recess. Once more I thought I heard voices, but this time they seemed to come from above. I shouted again —with the utmost power of my lungs I sent out shriek after shriek, and then I covered my eyes with my hands again, and listened as if every nerve were an ear. Vain hope, to think to distinguish any sound amidst that wild uproar!

I listened again—and now I thought I heard something like a footstep, and my own name called, not far from me. I raised my head peering the while keenly around me, and at that moment some loose stones and rubbish fell on my shoulder. I looked up—there was a dark object midway down the stairs at the foot of which I sat. I started to my feet; perhaps it was a smuggler taking advantage of the storm to secure his prize, and that boat had belonged to him—the thought gave me a momentary throb of fear; but a smuggler must be human I thought, and would save me from the fearful death before me. During the

instant that this uncertainty lasted, I distinctly heard the word "Mabel" again, and surely that was Mr. Annesley's voice! By this time he had reached the lowest step, and only a distance of about six feet separated us. I uttered a cry of joy.

"Thank God you are alive then, Mabel!" he exclaimed in a deep heart-thrilling tone, "and now, reach up both your hands and let me drag you up here."

I was about to comply, when the recollection occurred to me that the step he stood, or rather knelt upon, was not much more than a foot wide; he could not have sufficient footing to enable him to pull me up, and my weight would drag him down to certain death. I let my arms fall again. "No," I said, as a shiver ran through my whole frame, "the attempt to save me would be certain death to you, I will not accept even the chance of life at such a price."

"Fear nothing for me, dear Mabel," he replied, quickly, "I am quite safe, there is a rope round my waist, and strong arms and willing hearts above, should my foot slip; the waves are rising every moment—see, that one has almost overpowered you!" he exclaimed in a voice of anguish,

as the spray dashed over my head, and threw me with violence against the rock to which I clung instinctively. "Lose not a moment, Mabel! give me your hands, unless you wish me to spring down beside you."

That threat decided me. I raised my arms as high as I could reach, standing on tiptoe; and, telling me to steady my feet against the face of the cliff, he drew me up with a strong effort, till I stood beside him on the narrow ledge. Then holding me firmly in one arm, as I clung to him, he gave a signal, by means of the rope, to those above, and aided by its support, made his way cautiously up the giddy stairs, and deposited me in safety on the grass at the top.

It would be mere folly to attempt any description of the overpowering sensations of gratitude, and joy, and love which pervaded my whole being, as I saw Mr. Annesley kneeling beside me, almost as exhausted as myself with the effort he had made, and uttering low ejaculations of thankfulness for my safety. My heart overflowed with gratitude to God who had so wonderfully preserved me, and to him whom He had made the instrument of my preservation, in some mysterious way which at present I was unable either to conjec-

ture or inquire into. It was enough to feel that at the very moment when death seemed inevitable, His arm had been outstretched to save me, and that He had prepared the means, as the gourd was prepared to shelter the prophet from the noontide heat.

I don't know what I said, or whether I expressed any of the deep feelings of my heart, I only know that my tears flowed abundantly; all my energy seemed to have subsided now that the necessity for exertion no longer existed. I remained perfectly passive, my face hidden in my hands, conscious of little beyond a distant muffled murmur of the tumultuous sounds, which during the last few hours seemed to have been so loudly pealing my death knell. Conscious too of low, muttered words around me, but unable to speak or to stir, and hardly shewing any sign of life, except by the involuntary and irresistible trembling of my whole frame.

How I managed to get home I hardly know. Something was said of making a litter to carry me, and I heard Mr. Annesley reject the offer, and say he would himself be my bearer, but I exerted myself to say I could walk; and, clinging to the kind strong arm which had borne me up

the rock, I reached the Rectory, at last, shivering in every limb, where I heard myself consigned to the tender and thoughtful care of Phœbe, with many a sweet and precious word of pity and endearment to myself, and of injunction to her.

CHAPTER VII.

"But now with head declined
Like a fair flower surcharged with dew, she weeps."

MILTON.

"Dank dir für deinen Wink! Er macht
Mir meine böse Ahnung zur Gewissheit."

SCHILLER.

It was some time before I was able to leave my bed; the terror and cold to which I had been exposed for so many hours had shaken my nerves and affected me very severely. At the time, indeed, I had not been aware of the extent of my sufferings from both. The fearful rage of the elements had overawed and deceived me into fancying myself calm, when I was only subdued, and the mental excitement had made me totally heedless of bodily discomfort.

I could not sleep now without my imagination being haunted by all the horrors of that night, horrors, of which my description has given but

a very faint conception. I generally woke either struggling to escape from an overwhelming wave, or making vain efforts to gain a footing upon sand, which was perpetually gliding away and becoming water, or else with the idea that Mr. Annesley had lost his balance on the steps, and we were both falling into the waters below. Fancy played a thousand vagaries with me in my dreams; they were all full of terror, and I usually awoke screaming, or panting, or struggling.

My father was greatly overcome when he heard of the wonderful escape I had had, and I could not be sufficiently thankful that he had been spared the knowledge of the danger; while I never ceased to reproach myself with my extreme heedlessness, in having not only endangered my own life, but exposed that of others, and especially of Mr. Annesley, to such great risk, besides the anxiety which my present illness was causing. And that I, who only a few hours before, had been so ready to blame Amy for bringing sorrow and trouble upon others, should so recklessly have fallen into a similar error, struck me forcibly, and I hope not only disposed me to think more humbly of myself, but to judge more leniently, or rather to be less prone to judge others.

After a time I became curious to know how my

rescue had been brought about, and especially how Mr. Annesley came to be concerned in it, and from Phœbe I learned all the particulars.

Knowing that I had gone to the Grange, she said, she took no heed of my absence till towards eight o'clock, when beginning to think it time that my body should have its turn of refreshment with my mind, she sent Jem Maddocks to remind me of the flight of time.

"And you really thought that Mrs. Wilson would let me starve, then, Phœbe," I said laughing.

"No, Miss Mabel," she replied, "I can't say as I did, or that she would let you stay there later than you should be out; leastwise, I might have known that Fenton would have brought you home. I can't justly say what it was that made me uneasy, and it would be hard to tell what I was afeard of, but something came over me, and I couldn't feel comfortable without sending Jem to look after you."

"And Jem did not find me, so what did you do next, Phœbe?" I asked.

"Well, Miss Mabel, it was sometime afore he come home again, for when he got to the Grange, Mr. Annesley had just arrived, quite unexpected like; that is, he was not looked for, for a day or

two, and Mrs. Wilson was talking with him in the library, and Rachel was busy getting a bit of dinner ready all of a minute; so no one attended to poor Jem, till at last she caught sight of him and asked what he was standing there for? rather sharp, so he says he was come to see after Miss Mabel. 'Miss Mabel?' says Rachel laughing, "why, the boy's lost his wits, Miss Mabel hasn't been here since four o'clock.' 'Then where is she?' asks Jem; and just then Mrs. Wilson comes into the kitchen, and Jem asks her the same question which puts her all in a fluster. 'Miss Mabel not at home?' she says, and without waiting to hear more she runs back into the library to Mr. Annesley, and out he comes into the kitchen, and asks Jem and the others all they knew about you; and when he heared from Mrs. Wilson that you had gone to old Adam's cottage, he tells Jem not to come back to me, for it would only frighten me for no good; and away he takes him, first to old Adam's, and there he hears as you was agoing home by the beach, and when you left, and Jem said when he heared that, he was like one mad, and wanted Adam to get out his own boat, but he told him that would be of no manner of use in such a night; so then he was away to the coast-guard station, and they

got out their life boat, and he sends Jem home to me, to bid me have all ready for Miss Mabel warm and right again she come, and not to be frightened; he went in the life boat, Adam told me, along with others; but though they tried a matter of I don't know how long to bring the boat up to the rocks, the lope was so heavy on the shore that they were obliged to go back again."

"Then it was a boat that I saw, and the voices were not a mere fancy," I observed.

"Yes, Miss," Phœbe continued, "Adam told me Mr. Annesley shouted, and made all the signals he could, hoping for an answer; and when one of the men said he doubted the tide must have washed you away, for with such a wind it must be high up the cliffs, Mr. Annesley was almost frantic, so then he said he'd go back and try the Smuggler's Steps. They all told him it was madness, and that if you was on the beach he could not carry you up such a place, where there was hardly footing for one person; but Mr. Annesley was not to be put off it, so after some trouble they got back again, and then he bade them bring a good rope, and fasten round him; and though they all, one after the other, begged him not to try himself, but to let one of them go,

being more used to climbing about the rocks and places than he was, for there's not a man of them, or indeed anywhere hereabout, as would not venture his own life any time for Mr. Annesley; every one loves him—even old Adam, infirm as he is, would have gone if he'd have let him —nothing would do but he must go down himself. 'No, my men,' he says, 'you have all some one depending on you, and if any life is to be sacrificed, mine's the only one; but if you're only firm and steady, and mind my signals, I trust it will be all right, and we shall save Miss Mabel yet.' There was no fear they wouldn't attend to him Miss, and he know'd it too, so he went down the steps, which as you can tell, Miss, is hard enough to do in daylight, and still weather. There was a breathless silence among the men as soon as he was over the cliff, though with all the noise of the wind and the sea it would have been impossible to hear a sound. Adam lay down and looked over the cliff, and the rest stood to the rope waiting for the signal. At last it came, and they drew gently and steadily till they saw his foot firm on the cliff top, and you safe in his arms, and then Adam said there was a silent cheer by waving their hats, for the men was too used to be still, to forget themselves even then. Mr. Annes-

ley shook hands with them all round and thanked them heartily, and would have paid them handsomely, but not a man would take a sixpence from him; I warrant you, however, Miss, none of those men or their families have been forgotten by Mr. Annesley, or ever will be," Phœbe observed as she ended her tale.

I felt more than ever ashamed of my folly and heedlessness, as I listened to Phœbe's story; to think that so many valuable lives had been endangered, just because I had chosen to indulge a fancy, and had been silly enough to be heedless of warnings and signs, which were sufficiently plain to have made their neglect almost unpardonable, even in one less acquainted with the coasts and its peculiarities than I was; notwithstanding much that was grateful to my ear in the tale, I could feel nothing but sincere sorrow and shame, mingled with deep thankfulness. I think conchology and the 'wonders of the sea-shore,' dropped down to zero in my estimation on the spot, and though I did not absolutely register a vow against the future pursuit of such studies, I did make a resolution never to allow them to lead me into such a situation again.

As to Mr. Annesley, he did not give me the opportunity of either expressing my sorrow or

offering my thanks to himself, for he had again taken wing from Beechley, before I was well enough to come down stairs. Ere that time came, however, there had been great changes in the old state of things, of which I was first made acquainted by Mrs. Mainwaring, in a visit she paid me while I was still a prisoner to my room.

"Well, the Annesleys know what they are about, Mabel," she said one day, sitting down by my bed with an air of complacency. I thought she had something disagreeable to say, or at least that she imagined would be disagreeable, for she was not prone to visit sick rooms except upon such occasions, unless, indeed, the visit could be made to redound to her credit. I am afraid that will be thought an ill-natured speech, but it is nevertheless true. So, depositing her fashionably dressed person on a chair by my side, and laying a delicately gloved hand on the bed, she ejaculated the above words.

I made no answer for a moment, not choosing to enter upon an argument in which I was sure to express too much warmth, so she went on:

"You know all about this marriage, of course, so intimate as you are with them."

"Oh yes!" I replied, a little annoyed, "that is an old story, did you not know that before?"

"An old story?" she repeated, "why bless the child! what is she thinking of? It is quite a new one, though no doubt connected with the old one; you are right enough there, Mabel, I did not think you had been so clever."

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Mainwaring," I said impatiently, for I felt vexed by the air of wisdom she affected, and, perhaps, a little stung by the doubt expressed of my own.

"No, dear child, of course you don't," she went on, "why Dame Margaret is going to marry that old Colonel Crampton, with the good-natured daughter, who amused you so at the Grange that day. What do you think of that, dear?"

"Well, if it is for her happiness I am glad," I said, "and as you say the Annesley family know what they are about, I suppose it is so."

"No doubt of it, my dear," she answered with complacency, "she has got a home now, and somebody to take care of her, and indulge all her whims, I hope; all convenient enough now that the heiress is assuming independance, and choosing to live at Calvers, which does not suit Miss Annesley."

"She has her own house," I remarked, "as well as a home at the Grange."

"And how long will she have a home there?" was the triumphant rejoinder. "How long will it be, before the heiress of Calvers becomes mistress of Beechley Grange? Eh! Mabel?"

"It is impossible to say," I growled.

"I'll tell you what, Mabel," my tormentor continued, "they are a prudent set; they get hold of this child Edith, and bring her up to believe herself bound to marry this poor descendant of all the Annesleys, and patch up his ruined fortunes with her money; and then his cunning sister, having kept her snugly under her wing all these years, wisely provides herself with a husband, just as her charge is about to come of age, and may be called upon to fulfil the engagement to her young guardian."

There was quite enough semblance of truth to give Mrs. Mainwaring the handle she wanted, and to make it difficult, if not impossible to disprove her words, however false one might know them to be, so I said:

"Assertion is not proof, and I doubt if the Annesleys are either of them as clear-sighted and prudent as you give them credit for, Mrs. Mainwaring."

She gave a little low laugh. "Dear child," she said, "I forgot I was upon tender ground.—And so Clarence is tired of the army, and wants to sell out, and live with his mother at the Knoll," she went on, changing the subject.

"Who told you that, Mrs. Mainwaring?" I asked sharply, "for I don't think your information is correct."

"Isn't it, dear?" she asked, with the little provoking low laugh again. Then altering her tactics once more. "Do you know the Forsters are become so intimate with Mrs. Aubrey that the families are always together?—and so are Everleigh Court people."

"I know very little about any of them," I replied, indifferently, "since Amy's marriage, you must be aware, there has been nothing going on; nobody seeks me, nor do I seek anybody."

"Ah, there you are wrong, Mabel. Amy always kept her place, and would not let people forget her. Out of sight out of mind, is a homely saying, but a very true one you may be sure."

"A very worldly one, it certainly is," I said, "but it would not be applicable to those in whose good opinion I wish to live, and for the rest, I don't care."

"Poor Mabel!" was the quiet reply. Then,

after a minute's silence, she went on: "How gay they have been at Alverstoke Park lately! dear Mrs. Aubrey was telling me so the other day when I dined there. Mrs. Aubrey gives such nice parties when she does see people, one meets those that are really worth knowing; Lord and Lady Greathead, and the Dowager Marchioness of Silvertop, and her daughter Lady Alicia, sweet person Lady Alicia is! such a thorough musician; you met them of course at Alverstoke."

I replied that my stay at Alverstoke had been a very quiet one, and I had not met any one there.

"Ah, I suppose so," was the reply; "but now Lady Ruth is getting tired of that, so, as the Earl's health is improving, they are having a great deal of society. I suppose your friend has invited you there?"

I observed that I was glad to hear the Earl was better, Lady Ruth had not mentioned it when she wrote.

"Then she has invited you to Alverstoke?" Mrs. Mainwaring inquired.

"Some time ago she did, and I declined on papa's account," I said; "of course she would not ask me again, as the obstacle still existed, and it would be a mere empty compliment."

Again I heard the same low laugh, as she observed, "I don't know whether Bella Forster is going: I heard Lady Alicia talking with her about it—Ah, there's Mrs. Stanley's voice, and I have been tiring you to death, my dear, but I thought you would like to know all the news," and she bent down to give me her Judas-like kiss. "You must make haste and get well, dear, before Miss Annesley's wedding, for of course you will be invited to that."

"When is it to be, Mrs. Mainwaring?" I asked, "and will she be married from the Grange?"

"Oh no! she will be married at her own place, and then she will reside in Ireland, somewhere in the south. The wedding is to be next week, her brother has just gone down to it. Well, it is strange nothing should have been said to you; but they are odd people, the Annesleys! Lady Alicia went into fits when I told her that they piqued themselves on having come over with the Conqueror; she said they had better say at once they came with Julius Cæsar. Really, my dear, it is very absurd, those people's pride! I dare say Mrs. Aubrey will ask you and Mr. Willoughby to dine at the Knoll, when you are well enough; you would like Lady Alicia so much, she is such a

superior person. By the by, that is quite a romantic adventure, you and Mr. Annesley had. Don't let Edith Marsh know it! good bye, Mabel, dear."

And wafting a kiss from the tips of her delicate gloves, she vanished from the room, having during her half hour's visit, left prickles enough to cause irritation in every part.

It was very provoking to feel that one could be annoyed by such trifles, and yet unquestionably I was smarting all over. Why should it vex me that Miss Annesley did not consult me about her marriage? Was it reasonable to expect that she would do so? And could she be blamed, even if Mrs. Mainwaring's suggestions were true, that she was seeking a home for herself, and a fortune for her brother? What could it signify to me if Mrs. Aubrey should invite the whole peerage, and prefer asking Mrs. Mainwaring to meet them, instead of my father and Aunt Martha? Or what was there to be surprised at in Lady Ruth's entering more into society, and not renewing an invitation which she knew could not be accepted? Had I not often lamented her seclusion? And then, I did not believe that Clarence was going to leave the army, though I could not see any real cause why he should not come and reside with his mother,

even though Edith was to be Mrs. Annesley, and live wholly at Beechley Grange. There was nothing in all this, or anything else that she had said which need give me, or any reasonable person, one moment's annoyance; and yet, turn which way I would, those terrible little prickles would make themselves felt, and irritate me almost past bearing, till at last, fairly overcome by them, I buried my face in the pillow and cried heartily.

I could endure it no longer; and when Aunt Martha came into my room an hour later, I said I felt so tired of lying there, idle and good for nothing, surely I might get up and employ myself as usual; for I was quite well now, and sufficiently punished for the bad use I had made of my liberty —"That is," I added, correcting myself, "I have had time to see the full extent of my folly, and learn to be more careful when I am once more released from this durance, dear aunt."

Oh, how I enjoyed finding myself again one of the family group that evening! April had just set in, and there was such a warm, spring-like look everywhere; I almost forgot both the weakness of my body, and the soreness of my mind, as I sat at the window and looked into the garden, now gay with spring flowers, and the lilacs and

laburnums ready to burst their buds. I could fancy how bright and pleasant the old Grange must be looking now; and that brought the news Mrs. Mainwaring had so lately been communicating, into my mind.

"Papa, is it true that Miss Annesley is to be married next week?" I asked, as he sat in the place he occupied at all seasons in the drawing-room, whether there were fire in the grate or not.

"Yes, my dear," he replied, "it is quite true; Ralph Annesley told me of it when he was here lately, indeed, it was something connected with that, I believe, that brought him down then. One thing, he said, was to ask you to accompany him, and be present at the wedding, but you put that out of the question yourself, Mabel."

"I wonder you never told me of it, auntie," I remarked, feeling rather aggrieved. "I only heard of it from Mrs. Mainwaring to-day."

"My dear Mabel—" my aunt began deprecatingly.

"Your aunt does not take so much interest in these events as Mrs. Mainwaring, Mabel," interrupted my father, "she was thinking more of nursing than amusing her patient."

"At least I ought to have known that amuse-

ment was one branch of the profession," Aunt Martha observed; "but I believe I was rather doubtful whether it might gratify well enough to amuse you."

"Do you think, papa, that Mr. Annesley was glad—that is, did he wish his sister to marry?" I asked.

"Well, my dear, I suppose his wishes would have had very little to do with the matter. I dare say he is glad that his sister should please herself; and, perhaps, now that Edith will live so much at Calvers, it is better that Miss Annesley should have companions as well as a home."

"I remember Miss Crampton at the Grange last year," I observed, "she seemed a merry, good natured girl, but very different from Edith."

"Edith will not be able to come now to the Grange, I suppose," my aunt remarked, "you will miss your companion, Mabel."

"I don't think we were great companions, auntie, dear," I said. "Edith seems to me more fit for a plaything than a companion to anybody; and for that matter, the Grange itself is companion enough for me."

"I was going to propose that you should ask her to come here; this is but a dull place for you, my girl, now Amy is gone," my father said, with

a deep sigh, "and I think Annesley would like to have her invited."

"Dear papa, home is never dull to me, but I will very willingly share its pleasures with Edith, if you think it would gratify Mr. Annesley."

"Very well, my dear, suppose you write and tell her so," my father said, opening his book at the same time, as if to end the conversation; "I am sure we are bound to do more disagreeable things than that, for Annesley's sake."

A sentiment in which I fully, though silently, coincided.

CHAPTER VIII.

" Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,
Sweet dews shall weep thy fall to-night—
For thou must die.

" Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber never gives,
But when the whole world turns to coal,
Then chiefly lives."

GEORGE HERBERT.

" REALLY, Mabel, it was a most delicate attention on your part, to ask Edith here just while I am at home," was Philip's exclamation, as he helped me to put in some flower-seeds the morning after his arrival. " She is like a gay butterfly giving the required animation to what is generally, I must own, rather still life."

" We bow to the compliment," I replied, laughing; " which, indeed, is so finely and delicately imagined, that it would be difficult to say who may appropriate the greater share; whether

ourselves, whom you politely denominate still-life, or Edith, who ranks as the painted butterfly, fluttering from sweet to sweet. But don't be so ready to take the attention to yourself, fair Sir, for I must inform you that the arrangement was made, wholly irrespective of so august a personage."

"Indeed! then I presume Clarence was the object, since he is now at the Knoll."

"Clarence actually at the Knoll! When did he come, Philip?" I exclaimed, desisting from my employment, and looking up anxiously into his face.

"The news seems to disconcert you marvellously, Mabel, though I don't see why," he replied. "When? oh, we travelled together, and shared a fly from Winterford, and I dropped him at his house last night."

"Then Mrs. Mainwaring may be right, after all," I observed, resuming my work.

"Mrs. Mainwaring?" Philip repeated. "What, is that old lady as busy as ever?"

"Hush, Philip," I said, laughing, "how dare you venture to speak so disrespectfully of one whom, I sometimes think, the birds of the air do indeed serve."

"She is an old cat, nevertheless," Philip re-

peated, emphatically, "and ought to have the claws cut that she conceals in those delicately-fitting gloves. I don't believe that marriage of Amy's would ever have taken place, but for her love of intrigue and meddling. Once, when I was at home for the holidays, I got by accident a little behind the scenes, but I was immediately sworn to secresy by her, and was too young and thoughtless to know the extent of the mischief that was going on. She used to write to Percy, Mrs. Mainwaring, I mean, and bring messages from him to Amy, who, I don't think, sent any in return, though, no doubt, such were invented. She was always coming over here to talk and whisper with Amy, and one time, when Percy was at home for a week, meetings were contrived at Arden House; not with Amy's connivance though, I am sure, for I know she was unhappy; she used to be so very cross when I teazed her on the subject."

"It is quite what she delights in," I answered, "and I can fully believe that Amy acted under her influence, and contrary to her own better feelings; for she has great influence, and is so provokingly pleasant and good-natured, and seems so interested in one, that though I know her pretty well, I sometimes feel angry with myself, and

think I have judged her too harshly. She is in great trouble just now, because a young quick-set hedge she lately planted has been destroyed; she cannot understand how it is, that, though she spends far more money among the people than Mr. Annesley does, they are always doing her some ill turn, while they would go through fire and water to serve, or even please him."

"Of which your recent rescue was an example, eh, Mabel?" Philip said, archly.

"Yes, indeed," I replied seriously, "it was a very strong proof of the willingness of people to encounter even danger, for the sake of one who always acts and thinks kindly towards all. One day, papa told Mrs. Mainwaring, when she was speaking on the subject, that it was not money that would buy good will, which seemed to puzzle her more than ever."

"Well but, Mabel," Philip resumed, after a moment's pause, "what was this adventure of your's with Mr. Annesley? tell me about it, for I have never yet heard a coherent account of the affair."

"It is one I am too much ashamed of to talk about willingly," I replied, "and, unfortunately, it is just the thing to delight Mrs. Mainwaring. She is always alluding to it, and in a way, too,

that annoys me more than I can describe. But before entering on such a long story, I want to caution you about Edith, Philip."

"Oh, never fear, Mabel," Philip said gaily, interrupting me, "I am no entomologist; butterflies are very pretty, and so are their congeners, humming-birds, but I am too much bent upon hard study at present, to chase either."

"You are gone in chase of a wrong idea, at all events," I remarked, laughing. "It was not on your own account that I meant to caution you. I am afraid of Clarence."

"Of Clarence!" he echoed. "What has he to do with Edith?"

"Nothing at all," I replied, "or, at least, that ought to be so; but he is of another opinion, and Edith herself has no objection to laugh and talk more freely with him than she should, either for Ruth's sake, or Mr. Annesley's."

"I declare you are emulating Mrs. Mainwaring, Mabel, and turning match-maker," Philip said, half angrily.

"On the contrary, Philip, I find these matches made, and don't want to break them, so I am vexed that Clarence should be here just now."

"Why doesn't Mr. Annesley marry her then?" Philip asked.

"Because he cannot till she's of age, which will be in October; after that I suppose he will," I said with an involuntary sigh. "For though it is difficult to know whether she does really love him or not, she has refused other offers, I hear, so I conclude she has not seen any one she likes better."

A silvery peal of laughter interrupted me, and I looked up in some alarm, not knowing how much of our conversation might have been overheard by the subject of it, who came tripping along between the flower beds, and then turning herself quickly round, so as to make, what is called in nursery lingo, a cheese, deposited herself on the grass beside me.

"I have been watching this tête-à-tête from the window, for I don't know how long, and should have broken in upon it some time ago, but that good Mrs. Stanley restrained me, saying she thought the brother and sister had most likely something to talk about between themselves."

"She was right enough there, Edith," Philip said, "we had plenty to talk about, and you were the subject chiefly."

"And what might you be saying about me, Sir? Come, Mabel, you have made that hole quite deep enough, confess!"

"It was no treason, Edith," I replied, "Philip was thanking me for introducing a sunbeam into our usually gloomy landscape, and from light we gradually wandered away to darkness, and fell upon Mrs. Mainwaring."

"Poor Mrs. Mainwaring! she has no friends at the Rectory," Edith said laughing, "I think I must become her champion."

"A most doughty one," Philip observed; "we may be very sure that when such a one enters the lists for her, no knight will be foolhardy enough to contest the victory."

Edith laughed merrily, and I added, "Of all others, Edith, you should be the last to espouse such a cause, for the lady in question is merciless to Mr. Annesley."

"There you see, Philip!" she exclaimed, "an enemy meets me at the very entrance; what has Mrs. Mainwaring done?"

"I thought you were to be her champion through good report and evil report, Edith," I said laughing, "and now you want to be her judge."

"I believe it is a matter altogether beyond my powers," was Edith's reply, "so I may as well lay down my arms and surrender at discretion."

"So be it," Philip observed. "The lady is quite qualified to fight her own battles, and judge her own cause; butterflies and humming-birds are made to draw nectar out of flower-cups, and not gauge the depths of Mrs. Mainwaring's lawyer-like mind."

"But, Philip," I interposed, "you have not told me anything about Amy; I thought you would be full of news after spending some days with them at Canterbury."

"I thought they were at Kington," Edith suggested.

"So they were a year ago," I said, "but as humming-birds flit from flower to flower, so do Her Majesty's forces from place to place."

"Oh yes, I forgot; and how does Amy like such a changeful life, Philip?" she asked.

"She seems very happy," was the reply, though I thought it was spoken with a reservation; however he went on, "Percy is an offhand pleasant fellow, a favourite wherever he goes, and Amy seems equally liked. They were in no end of gaiety—dinners, balls, and parties every night, and Amy is looking very handsome."

"Ah, now I see whence comes our stigma of still life," I observed.

"Well, it must be confessed that Arden Rise

is still, compared with what I have just left, and yet there is one element of enjoyment here that is wanting there."

"I shall understand that as a personal compliment," Edith said, with one of her merry laughs, though I thought Philip had another meaning. "But for fear I should become still life too," she went on, "I shall not sit here any longer; come, Mabel, you have done gardening enough for to-day, I want to go out and take a ramble in the fields; so, lay by your trowel and gloves and come away."

It was some days before an opportunity occurred of renewing the conversation with Philip, which Edith had interrupted. In the meantime, Clarence was often at the Rectory. He had always something to propose; one day it was a pony that would carry a lady beautifully; but Edith was too timid to be tempted by that, and he did not offer me the use of it; sometimes he would come accoutred as a fisherman, and ask us to take pity on his solitude and accompany him, an invitation Edith was never loath to accept; to sit still indeed on a lovely April day, by the side of the sweet Arden, and listen to the cooing of the doves, and the rich warblings of the song birds; to watch the glancing ephemeræ

darting about in the glittering sunshine, and listen to the chirp of the grasshopper, while the clouds coursed each other across the changeful sky, throwing their broad shadows over the smiling landscape, and the balmy air was perfumed with the delicate fragrance of the wild flowers that carpetted the earth, had no charms for the volatile humming-bird, but she found amusement enough in chasing the butterflies, and filling her hands with the bright flowers; while Philip and I reclined beneath the shade of the trees and read, or talked, or jested with Clarence, whose thoughts and eyes were much more occupied in following the graceful movements of the childlike Edith, than in attending to the graver duties of the sport he was ostensibly following.

"Ah, Clarence!" she exclaimed, on one of these occasions, as, tired of chasing creatures as brilliant and volatile as herself, she flung herself down on the grass beside us, "that ancient motto 'though absent not forgotten,' which my old nurse used to think the perfection of sentiment, can never be yours, I fear."

Clarence looked doubtful of her meaning, and I think a recollection of Ruth crossed him at the moment.

"That's a serious charge, Edith," Philip said,

"and not a fair one to bring against any one so suddenly, particularly one who bears Her Majesty's commission, 'To love and to ride away.' You have set Clarence thinking upon all the hearts he has won and broken, you see."

We all laughed, though that of Clarence was a little constrained, and he seemed occupied with his line; perhaps there was a nibble at the moment.

"Oh, I was not thinking of hearts," Edith rejoined, "that is, not of human hearts, or anything so fickle. I meant Mingo, you never ask for him, Clarence, have you forgotten where you left him?"

"By no means," he replied, apparently not much relieved by the turn, though he tried to look unconscious. "I know he is in such good hands, that I am in no hurry to reclaim him; a dog, you know, stands a bad chance in a barrack-yard, so I hope you are not quite tired of him yet."

"He is the dearest, cleverest little creature possible," she said; "and far from being tired of him, I think when you do claim him, you may find some difficulty in getting the claim allowed."

Clarence threw me a half triumphant glance,

and I shook my head at him, then starting up at once, he exclaimed,

"It is of no use to try this any longer, the fish will not rise to-day. Mabel, you never go to the Grange now, have you and the Penates quarrelled?"

"Oh no," I replied, "we are on speaking terms still. But Edith is the genius of the place, you know, I only haunt it like a melancholy ghost, when the bright living realities are absent."

"Suppose we have a look at the quaint old place to-day then; will you do the honours, Edith?"

"I hate the Grange!" she exclaimed, "it is such a gloomy place, those iron gates shut with such a sullen clang behind one, they ought to have the motto,

"'Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' intrate.'

inscribed over them; and then the dull stained glass windows, and the quaint old furniture, and the armour in the Hall—I can't think how any one can like it."

Clarence's laugh was peculiarly gay as he said, "I thought you had a gilded cage there."

"It is but a cage," she said poutingly, "and all birds love liberty, humming-birds especially;

I wish Gardie would sell the place, I could not bear to live there."

"I hope you never will," I heard Clarence mutter in a low tone as he was walking by her side. I did not hear her answer. If she spoke at all, it was in a tone still lower, but my own mental ejaculation was—I hope not too, for the owner's sake—though, perhaps, he might not have thought the wish a kind one. And then I fell into thinking how little we any of us know how to shape our own happiness, and yet how we are always, even the wisest and the best, struggling to form it after our own pattern. Eating ashes as it were bread, putting aside the kind Hand that would lead us into green pastures and beside the waters of comfort, and wandering away into barren, stony wildernesses; scorning to pick the simple wayside flowers that each might fill his hand with, and bent on obtaining some far off, fancied good, shewing gaudily in the distance, which, when reached, only tears us with its thorns, or withers in our grasp.

Occupied with these thoughts, I walked on silently, without attending to the conversation of my companions. I was trying to see my own path clearly, as far as its turnings and windings would let me; seeking not to tread down or fling aside the

flowers, small and inconspicuous though they might be, which strewed it, but to inhale gratefully their fragrant odour and be content.

Edith's visit did not last much longer. I think our life was rather quieter than she liked after a time; and though my father tried not to be any check upon our mirth, I saw it was often more than he could bear. She was going to Calvers, where she intended leading a much gayer life; a distant relation of her mother's, one of the far off cousins she had mentioned, a widow who had no home of her own, had promised to come and live with her. She was a very nice person, she said, and she intended to have plenty of people in the house, and to make Gardie like it at last, better than the old Grange; for of course he would be with her as much as ever, how could she get on without him?—till—well, it was of no use to look forward to that—I must be sure to come to the grand festivities she meant to have in October, when she should come of age. "You will promise me that, Mabel; Dame Margaret has engaged to come over from Ireland, and I shall have Amy and her husband, and Mrs. Aubrey and Clarence, it would be nothing without him; and I shall ask your friend Lady Ruth and her father; they came to Brackenhurst," she went

on in reply to my doubtful look, "why should they not come to Calvers? and we will invite Mrs. Mainwaring, too, for the sake of giving her an excuse to get a new dress from Paris."

I said I should like to see Calvers extremely, and the state of its heiress, but could make no promise, because I considered myself quite as important a person at Arden Rise as she was at Calvers, therefore I must be guided by circumstances. And so we parted, and singularly enough, within a few days after her departure, Clarence's leave expired, and he left the Knoll.

"Edith Marsh pretty?" exclaimed Mrs. Mainwaring a day or two later, as my aunt was praising her beauty, "I think her a little underbred thing, not to be compared with Bella Forster, or even Lady Ruth Aubrey; she scarcely condescends to notice me, not that I care for that, I am going to Nolands, the Marchioness of Tantivy's. Mr. Annesley tried hard to get himself and his ward in there, but he did not succeed; you meet none but the best society there, only very superior people."

I secretly wondered how Mrs. Mainwaring came to be of the number; but as it was possible we might not agree in our estimate of superior people, I allowed her to consider me duly impressed with

the privilege she afforded me, of clinging even to the outer skirts of such society.

Soon after this, an increased gloom came over my father. I felt sure it was connected with Amy, though he said nothing about her; but I had lately seen old Mr. Claytoun's servant come to the house more than once with letters, and his coming seemed always to incease the depression of my father's spirits. I don't think he confided in Aunt Martha, or she would have told me; Mr. Annesley was the only one of whom he made a friend, and he very rarely came into the neighbourhood now, and then but for a few days at a time. In my father's estimation, I was still only the dull, cold child, so I could not expect to be permitted to share his sorrows, whatever their source might be.

I heard often from Amy, but through all the sparkling gaiety of her style, I could not help fancying there was a dark thread of uneasiness discernable. I used to read her letters over and over again, and study them as if they were the writings of a sage, whose words bore an interpretation deeper than that on the surface. I could not tell what I feared; and when sometimes the gay jest did indeed fall off into a sadder strain at the close of a sentence, I used to try and laugh

away the apprehensions that would arise, all the more disturbingly, because, instead of taking any definite form, they only appeared and vanished thus vaguely, floating about, more like the creations of my own imagination than anything real or palpable. I knew well how readily, when once a thought has entered the mind, all things combine to give it substance; and how prone we are to torture the airy shadows and gossamer threads which cross us, into material objects, and clothe them in the colours, sad or gay, in which circumstances have predisposed us to view them.

The slight hints which I had heard from Mr. Annesley, Philip, and my father, with respect to Percy, had no doubt prejudiced me against him, I used to argue with myself; and so when Amy expressed a regret that he sometimes allowed her to go into society alone; or made any allusion to his having companions or occupations which drew him away from her; or spoke of his complaining unreasonably of extravagance in her own expenditure; these ideas, intangible as they were, recurred to my mind, and with each recurrence, assumed at once increased magnitude, and a more shadowy form. I was so much occupied with these thoughts and fears about Amy; so desirous, if possible, to alleviate my father's

gloom; so absorbed in my studious endeavours to cheer him, now by soothing him with music, now by drawing him insensibly to converse on subjects which always interested him, and thus lead his mind from the one thought which I knew was secretly corroding it, that I had no time to dwell upon anything that was painful or depressing in my own future; and if the remembrance would intrude itself, how admirably Mr. Annesley might have aided me in all my efforts to amuse and comfort my father, to remove all the obstacles from his path, and charm away his grief, I hastened to banish the murmur from my heart. That heart had many sweet recollections stored away in its sealed up cells; facts and memories which could not now be taken from me, which were mine for ever, and which, with their delicate perfume pervaded my whole being, and even shed their influence over my character. Yes, it was Mr. Annesley who had led and encouraged me to cultivate my talents and enrich my mind, so that now, unwilling as he was to own it, even my father could not but feel that I was capable of being a companion, if not a help to him. He it was who had taught me, not by word, but by example, how to minister to and comfort others; all that I delighted in now, had in some

way or other been derived from him; even the strength which I felt, and which enabled me to look out over the lone and barren desert of my future, he it was who had infused it, or rather who had taught me whence to seek, and how to exercise it.

Very blank, often, young as I was, did that future appear to me; for though I had family ties, and some few friends, the former had not the sweetness usually attached to the word—I was an unloved member of the family—among them, but not of them; and by some strange perversity of my nature, all the affection which glowed so warmly in my own heart, and sought so earnestly to find answer among those amid whom I was placed, appeared always to be misunderstood, rejected, and thrown back again, so that my fate seemed to be, to walk alone, caring for others, uncared for in return. One there was, who had cared for me, I believed, but he had in a measure thrown me by now, and though I knew he would ever be a friend, there were others to whom the warmer feelings of his heart belonged. I was learning, by degrees, to accustom myself to this solitude of the heart, and to extract even from the bitterest portion, some of that sweetness which is, no doubt, always to be found when a duty is undertaken

humbly and obediently. Uninviting as the prospect sometimes appeared, flowers were beginning to spring up, and the dreary valley still had its wells at which I might mitigate, if not wholly quench my thirst.

Now and then I looked towards Alverstoke, and the consciousness that in Ruth I had a steady, if not a very demonstrative friend, was a pleasant thought, and one too which made me feel more satisfied with my own lot, for I could not but foresee trials even more severe, for her. From the first, sympathy had been withheld from me, I was, as it were, to the manner born, and as eels are pleasantly said to be used to the barbarity of being flayed alive, I might be supposed inured to the indifference of others; but she had been brought up in such a glowing atmosphere of affection, that the chilling breath of colder climes would nip and destroy all her bloom; and yet if Clarence were to be her husband would she be loved as she was now? and if he were not, how would she meet the disappointment? and then my thoughts would sometimes wander away to Edith Marsh, and I marvelled at the strange fate which seemed hers. So light, almost frivolous a being as she was, yet the object of the tenderest love and solicitude from childhood;

holding in her careless grasp a jewel of priceless value, while apparently utterly ignorant of its worth, and ready to fling it away in exchange for a bit of glass that would shine as brightly. Receiving homage again lightly, from one whose incense should be offered at a different shrine; holding loosely the reins of many hearts in her childish hands, and unconscious or heedless of the pain she caused, while occupied only in sunning her glittering wings in the warmth of the brilliant atmosphere in which she basked.

But as the summer drew towards a close, and the day approached when she would be of age, I could detect in the tone of, even the bright humming-bird's letters, a something, which wore a shade, if not exactly of anxiety, at least of uneasiness.

It was difficult to say what caused it; there was a strange fluttering from Clarence to Mr. Annesley, and back again. One letter would lead me to fancy that Clarence was the object of her affections, and that she was only endeavouring to smother the reproaches of her conscience, which told her that she ought not to listen to his seductions; the next was full of petulant complaints of Gardie's strictness, and his lectures on what he called her trifling with Clarence. Occasional

wanderings to other subjects, always interrupted by passionate outbreaks of anger against Gardie, or Clarence, or any one else, who could suppose that either she or Clarence were in earnest. Then would come a letter written in a milder spirit, wherein the 'Gardie' merged into 'Mr. Annesley,' and his praises were the theme of her song, varied by complaints of his distant coldness; impatient longings for the month of October, and wonderings what would be the next event she should have to communicate; and then would follow a long list of pleasures and gaieties in which she had been immersed; descriptions of her London season, and the sensation she had caused, with playful guessings to whether the beauty or the heiress were the more admired. Sometimes a little pride in the superiority of 'Gardie,' so universally acknowledged, would peep out; then a few traits so characteristic of him, that there was no need for her to say of whom she was writing; and again all her accustomed frivolity would resume its sway, and she was the fluttering little humming-bird of the Grange once more.

There was for me much food for thought in all these letters, and more and more evidence of the necessity for disciplining my own heart. It was plain that if not constantly, Mr. Annesley was

frequently by her side, either in town or at Calvers, and equally plain that the dear old Grange was almost forsaken by him. In spite of all the adorers whom Edith enumerated, Clarence seemed the only one who could be called a rival, and with all her little coquettish ways, I hoped better of Edith than to believe that she would seriously give him encouragement; so I used to close her letters with a sigh, and then turn again to my round of pleasant duties, helping my father in his parish, reading or singing to him, and spending my leisure in the garden or the Grange Terrace, or sometimes on the sea-shore, from late events dearer than ever to me; or, when the weather prohibited such out door amusements, crouched in the old attitude in the mullioned window of the Grange library, eyes and mind equally intent on the book before me.

CHAPTER IX.

" And isled in sudden seas of light,
My heart, pierced through with fierce delight,
Burst into blossom in his sight."

TENNYSON.

It was on an evening towards the close of August, that I was sitting thus. It had been one of those sultry warm days, frequently felt in that month; my father was gone to Winterford, Aunt Martha was spending the day at the Knoll, and had promised to join me at the Grange, where we intended to drink tea in the summer-house, and pass an evening of enjoyment with books and work. The whole of the day, therefore, had been at my own disposal. I had spent the afternoon in a walk to Adam Griffith's, and a long ramble on the sands, till wearied out with the distance and the heat, I had taken refuge at last in the cool, inviting library, and opening the poems of old George Wither, ensconced myself in my usual place.

For a time, my mind followed my eyes, and both were occupied with the beautiful ideas, and quaint, picturesque language of the writer, till by degrees, fatigue overpowered me, the words began to assume strange forms, their meaning to become oddly mixed up with other thoughts, and leaning my head back against the stone mullion, I fairly gave in, and wandered away into the land of dreams.

It seemed but a few minutes, but by the change that had come over the evening, it must have been an hour or more that I had slept, when I was awoke by the gentle closing of the door behind me, leading out into the garden, and a cautious step advancing. I roused myself in a moment, with that curious unwillingness to allow that I had been sleeping, which people always feel when they have been stealing a nap at unaccustomed hours; and taking it for granted that it was Aunt Martha who entered, I said, without turning,

"Oh, auntie, I wish you had not come so soon; I did not expect you for an hour yet."

"I am sorry I am unwelcome, Mabel," said a voice, which, in spite of an endeavour at disguise, could never deceive me, and as at the sound of it I

sprung off the window seat, and stood up, I saw Mr. Annesley beside me.

There was an odd mixture in my feelings at that moment. I was both too much surprised by his appearance to be able to say a word, and it was at the same time no surprise at all; there came over me that inexplicable sensation, which every one must have occasionally experienced, which made me feel in some unaccountable way prepared for, and almost in expectation of his coming. I sat down again without speaking, though it was impossible to remove my eyes from his face, and he seated himself beside me, saying with a smile as he did so,

"You give me a cold reception, Mabel; have I been so long an absentee that the very Penates have forgotten me?"

"Not yet," I replied, with a calmness that I could not explain to myself, "but it is a dangerous experiment, and should not be repeated often, that is, if you really wish—" and there I stopped, for fear of saying more than I cared for him to hear.

"If I really wish not to be utterly forgotten, you would say perhaps," he went on gravely, "like one who falls in battle, and as the ranks close up

and move on, another fills the vacant place, and the lost comrade is remembered no more."

"Madame de Staël says something of that sort, I believe," I replied, "but a comrade lost is not necessarily forgotten; we can feel that a placé has been made vacant, and mourn those whom we miss, though duty and discipline oblige us to march on in an unbroken column, and shew a firm unshaken front to the enemy."

"You are very martial in your similes, Mabel," he observed, "did you get those ideas from the old Republican you have been reading?"

"On the contrary," I said, "I was but following out your own suggestion. Wither's images, Puritan as he was, are generally more—"

"Graceful, perhaps," he interposed, seeing I hesitated for a word. "But did you expect me, Mabel? I had been watching your slumbers for some minutes from outside the window, and stole round, intending to enter without disturbing them, and give you a surprise when you should awake, and you greeted me as if I had but returned from a walk."

"I almost think I must have expected you," I said, laughing, "it seemed so natural to hear your voice, though certainly it was Aunt Martha's for which I was listening. I had bidden her to a

feast in the summer-house this evening; you will think I take strange liberties, I fear."

"I have no right, even had I the inclination, to find fault with you on that point, Mabel," he replied. "Indeed, I am much more disposed to be grateful for your constancy to a place, which I neglect too much, though most unwillingly; so though I can urge no claim, I must petition to be included in the summer-house party this evening."

I laughed at the idea of his asking to be a guest in his own house, and suggested that in order to obviate such an anomaly, we should return to the Rectory, where I could play the hostess with more propriety, but he would not listen to such an arrangement. "It would remind him of old times," he said, "when Amy and I used to do the honours of the summer-house to my father and himself; and though he owned that he was undeserving of such enjoyment now, he hoped I would gratify him this once more. To-morrow," he said, "he would spend at the Rectory, for he had much to talk about with my father." I suppose my quick glance showed anxiety, for he went on, "it is chiefly on my own affairs that I want his advice, time is running on, and in little more than a month my guardianship will end."

"And then you will be able to live more at the Grange, perhaps," I added, as he paused.

"I fear not, Mabel," was the reply, accompanied by a deep sigh. "I fear the old place will see less than ever of its master. Edith, indeed, is very urgent that I should let, or even sell it."

"And you?" I asked, in a low tone.

"You don't suppose I would listen to such a plan, Mabel?" he said, almost reproachfully, "you surely cannot think me quite so degenerate! No, I shall at least please myself with the idea that whatever you think of me, or whether you think of me at all, you will still be mistress of the Grange."

I made no answer. What could I have said? I would have given worlds to ask him if his marriage with Edith was then determined upon. I thought what a sacrifice he must feel it, and then I wondered if she had really discovered his worth, and if her frivolity had been merely assumed to conceal deeper feelings. I remembered the many offers I had heard of her refusing, and the anxiety and perplexity that had of late been visible in her letters. Clarence was the only one for whom she had shewn a shadow of preference, and perhaps she thought of him more as a brother than a lover, though I knew from himself that he took a

different view of the subject. But then, had not the mere apprehension of having grieved her guardian occasioned her an illness? and might I not be prejudiced in my judgment, and disposed to imagine her more childish and frivolous than she really was?

I felt dreadfully selfish and jealous. The idea of Edith sharing his thoughts, becoming his daily and hourly companion, admitted to a partnership in all his joys and sorrows, was insupportable to me. I knew at that moment the most cruel tortures of jealousy. I felt almost out of my senses, and yet I sat quite still, with a strange, incomprehensible calmness, my eyes fixed upon the book that lay in my lap, and my fingers busied with its leaves. I was conscious that his eyes were bent earnestly on my countenance, that perhaps he was decyphering the feelings that might be all too plainly written there, and I made an effort to break the silence, which, however, could not have lasted more than a minute, so without looking up, I observed, in the same low tone in which I had before spoken.

"Then you are really going to forsake the Grange for ever, and your old friends will be forgotten," and as I spoke an involuntary tear dropped upon the open page. I don't know

whether he saw it, for with the first sound of my voice, he rose and walked hastily to the other end of the room, then returning and leaning with folded arms against the opposite end of the large oriel window in which I sat, he said,

"You are unjust, Mabel, and unlike yourself, have you not said but a minute ago that to lose a friend was not to forget; and do you think—?" he was strangely agitated; again he walked to the other end of the room and once more he resumed his position and his former calm tone. "Old associations, Mabel," he went on, "are not easily forgotten, though circumstances may cause them to be broken up, and if you are hurt at the idea of my forsaking the Grange—"

"The Grange!" I exclaimed, interrupting him passionately, "what is the Grange—what will it be to me when—" and then as the full meaning of what I was about to say flashed upon me, I broke off, and hiding my face in my hands, burst into a passion of tears.

There was a minute of silence; he made no attempt, as at other times, to soothe, or pacify me; I felt that he understood all that I would have said, and without daring to raise my head, I wept on silently. Presently he rose, and took two or three turns down the apartment, and then returning to the

window he seated himself once more beside me, and affecting a light tone, though the unusual tremor of his voice proved it to be merely assumed, he said,

"Come, Mabel, we who have been friends for so many years must not quarrel now; you will not deprive me of kind thoughts, because a something stronger than my own will, makes me an exile from the home I have loved so well, nor will you refuse me your aid in attending to many things here and in the village which no one could do so well?"

He spoke gently, but there was clearly a constraint in his words and manner; was he putting force upon himself to control his own emotions, or to conceal his knowledge of the cause of mine? I was not mistress of myself sufficiently to canvas the question, it was enough to be aware that he had penetrated the thin veil which concealed my own feelings towards him, and that whether they were reciprocated or not, I was not to be admitted into the secret of his heart. The tone showed me that he wished me to think he had interpreted my words and manner as alluding only to the Grange and ourselves generally, and to feel that he relied upon me as a friend; but not all his kindness could relieve me from the bitter feeling

which bowed down my head, and filled my heart with an agony that could only vent itself in silent tears.

There was a pause of some seconds, and then he rose again; I made an effort as he did so, and, lifting up my flushed face, said hesitatingly,

"You must not misunderstand me, Mr. Annesley, I did not mean—"

"No, Mabel," he said, interrupting me quickly, "I know that you did not mean to reproach your old friend with disloyalty either to those he values so inestimably, or to the dear old Grange. Don't fear, my little Undine, that I shall resent the warmth of your anger, though I would deprecate it; but we must not quarrel, Mabel, I could not bear that," he said extending his hand; "and now I think Aunt Martha must have been waiting for you, shall we not go in search of her?"

I could not take the hand he offered, it was not certainly resentment, but some even stronger feeling that prevented me, nor could I think of passing the evening as we had planned; I urged that the heat of the day and my long ramble had made my headache, that I would rather go home, and perhaps he would tell my aunt; and at once he was busy relieving me from the heavy volume that lay on my lap, drawing the shawl over my

shoulders, and doing innumerable little kindnesses; then, taking my hand as I stood up, he drew it within his arm, and led me down the steps, and out into the garden; as we walked homeward he entered into many details that he affected to want my help in during his absence, interesting me in all his plans, leading me by a variety of kind, thoughtful ways to believe that he had not attached any ulterior meaning to my passionate exclamation, and seeming so utterly unconscious himself of anything peculiar in my outburst, as to relieve me of half my distress; and yet with all this he was but making more and more clear the inestimable value of that noble, generous heart, which the heavy aching of my own told me could never be mine.

My headache, indeed, was no mere pretext. Fatigue and agitation had made my temples throb so violently that I could with difficulty look up, or support the weight of my head.

"You deserve a severe lecture upon carelessness of yourself, Mabel, and especially upon taking such long walks in weather like this," he said, as he lingered for a moment by the side of the sofa, to which he had led me. "But you are not able to hear it now, so I shall go back to the Grange with your message to Aunt Martha, and tell her to

be merciful in her strictures; to-morrow, however, you must be prepared to receive a good scolding." And as he left the room, it seemed as if the darkness of midnight sank down into my heart, and laying my head on the arm of the sofa, I yielded to the flood of bitter tears which would not be controlled.

A long time elapsed before Aunt Martha came in, my tears had had time to exhaust themselves, and me too, and wearied out with the strong emotions I had undergone, a deep calm had fallen upon me, and I lay perfectly still, not even trying to think—though from time to time the remembrance would intrude, that all which I had so long anticipated, and yet endeavoured to ignore, had now resolved itself into reality; Edith Marsh was indeed to be Mr. Annesley's wife, and the Grange would henceforth be an emblem of my own heart, deprived of the sunshine of his presence, and given up to the owls, and bats, and ghosts of departed joys, which must for ever haunt the deserted chambers.

See him to-morrow? Impossible! that hope was over for me! No, I could not frame any plan, or make any plausible excuse then, for my brain refused to do anything but ache and throb; but I felt that before the morrow came I must

devise some method of avoiding him, if it were only keeping my room, or even my bed.

Aunt Martha came in at last, loaded with a basketfull of ripe wall-fruit and grapes, which she said Mr. Annesley had insisted upon picking himself, and had kept her at the Grange, while he did so, and then he had carried the basket, and only left her at the shrubbery gate. He had been telling her how I had overfatigued myself, she said, and shewing so much anxiety, and giving her such injunctions to take care of me, and betraying so much interest, "that I could not help thinking he was more than a friend, Mabel, and was near telling him so."

"I hope you did not dear aunt?" I said, rousing myself, and speaking anxiously.

"No, dear, you need not look so frightened, I said nothing of the kind, though I could not help thinking he was much more like a lover than Clarence is to Lady Ruth.

"Poor Ruth!" I sighed.

"But that reminds me," continued my aunt, "who should arrive at the Knoll this evening, but Lord Ottersee and Lady Ruth. Mrs. Aubrey had been desired to keep their coming a secret, so that it might be a surprise to you, and Lady Ruth wants you to go to the Knoll to-morrow, she has a

scheme to propose about a little tour, in which she wishes you to join them; she said she could not promise to come here to-morrow, but would send the carriage, hoping it might bring you back. I told her I thought you would like to go with them, but since seeing Mr. Annesley, I don't know how you may feel disposed, my dear."

"Oh, I should like it so much!" I exclaimed, "but would it be possible auntie? what would papa say, or rather what would he wish?"

"If he saw those wan cheeks and heavy eyes, that I see now, Mabel, I am sure he would willingly consent, and indeed I think you want a change. Mr. Annesley was saying you work too hard in the parish, helping my brother, and certainly you never take any pleasure now. I really think your papa is better than he was, and as Mr. Annesley will be here for a fortnight he tells me, it is an excellent opportunity; you will not be missed so much, and will come back fresh to your work, unless," she added smiling, "something may have passed in this long interview with Mr. Annesley, which may make him unwilling for you to go away at present."

I assured my good aunt she need have no apprehensions on that subject, and that if papa did

not object, I should like to go just now of all things.

"They only stay one day at the Knoll," my aunt said, "so you will not have much time to think about it."

"So much the better!" I replied, and as it could not be long before my father's return home, I would propose it to him at once, and then I should be ready to go to the Knoll in the morning, and accompany them the next day.

CHAPTER X.

"But I so oft have found to my content,
And felt so oft what comforts God hath sent
When of all outward helps we are deprived,
That, (would the same by all men were believed)!
It might be thought true pleasures were possessed
Of none but men forsaken and distressed."

GEORGE WITHER.

My father made no difficulty to the plan when it was proposed to him. My absence would be more than compensated by the presence of Mr. Annesley, which was an unlooked for pleasure, and glad as I was to be allowed to visit my kind friends, I think it gave me a pang to see how little I was necessary to his happiness.

Nothing could have come more opportunely than Ruth's proposal. Mr. Annesley at the Grange for a whole fortnight! What a fortnight of exquisite torture would it have been to me! and how could I have borne the daily contact into which we must have been inevitably thrown?

This might indeed be considered as one of those kind providences, which we commonly call chances, and which, in our necessity, we so often find prepared in some mysterious way, springing up in the midst of our calamity, to be a shelter from the burning shafts of sorrow, that might otherwise beat down upon and consume us.

But in spite of my gratitude, and the pleasure I felt in the prospect before me, there was a soreness at my heart, a gnawing, dull aching pain that nothing could make me unconscious of; and I hardly knew whether it was really pleasure that I felt, as I stept into the Knoll carriage, which came for me soon after breakfast; as I did so, the thought of who would be ere long crossing the threshold of my home, pressed upon me, and I wondered whether my absence would be regretted. On passing the Grange gates which stood open, I glanced down the avenue, and saw Mr. Annesley at a little distance talking with the woodman, he looked up as the carriage went by, but I threw myself back and avoided meeting his sight.

The remembrance of those three weeks spent with Ruth and her father, is as a spot of bright sunshine on the edge of the bleak moor, that was then opening out before me. It was one of those quiet pleasures which present no salient

points that would give interest to a narrative. It was as food and water brought by the angel, because the journey across the wilderness would, without it, have been too much for me; it was a gentle folding of the wings, a laying of the head on the bosom of a friend, a rest and preparation for the rough road I should have to travel along.

Much I enjoyed the country we passed through, and the places we visited. I would not suffer myself to indulge in vain repinings; after all, there were others whose lot might be harder than mine. I felt sure Mr. Annesley esteemed me, I sometimes thought he loved me, that had the power of choice been allowed him, it might have fallen upon me, and the thought almost reconciled me to my fate. I would rather be the Mabel that I was, beloved by Mr. Annesley, though doomed never more to look upon him, than be Edith his wife, shut out from his heart—the object of his care, of his indulgence—but not of his affection. Oh! if it were indeed so, and she should ever awake to the truth, which of us would be the one to be pitied? And he himself—was there not hardship in his lot? And then Ruth—she too had sorrow, and yet how unmurmuringly she bore it! Who is there, indeed, that looks round dispassionately

on the destiny of others and compares it with his own, that will not find cause to be content, nay even thankful for the place that Providence has assigned him, be it never so mixed with bitter ingredients?

Mr. Annesley had left some days before I returned home. September was drawing to a close, and early in October, Edith's one-and-twentieth birthday was to be celebrated with great festivity at Calvers. Lord Ottersee and Ruth were going there; Clarence was with his regiment at Malta, and would not be able to get leave, Ruth said, in her usual calm tone, though I could not but fancy she must feel rather glad than otherwise that it so happened. For myself, though as a matter of course I was invited, as well as my father and Aunt Martha, the idea of going was out of the question with any of us, for various reasons, all which centered in one, when a few days before the time, letters came from Amy full of trouble and distress. The regiment was about to change its quarters, tradesmen's bills were pouring in to a frightful amount, which they had no means of paying. They had been living recklessly, indulging in every extravagance; Percy had been in the habit of giving her the most expensive presents, and she had spent money lavishly, on the supposition, ignorant as she was

of his resources, that they were unlimited. She now found that beyond his pay and a very moderate allowance from his father, he had nothing but what he could make at play. For a time he had been a great winner, both at the billiard table and on the turf, but latterly luck had deserted him. They had applied to Mr. Claytoun in vain; having twice before saved him from ruin, and being now in addition displeased at Percy's marriage, he had refused them any further assistance. It was a terrible blow to my father, who suspicious as he was of Percy, I don't think was aware of his addiction to play.

What he could muster, he sent to Amy at once, and again I bethought me of my godfather's legacy, and entreated to be allowed to let Amy have it, but my father was firm in his refusal, "There is no knowing of what use that sum may be to you, Mabel," he said, "for it is but little I have been able to save for any of you; such debts as Percy's, are, I fear, beyond either your power or mine to discharge, and you may be glad of it by and bye; meanwhile, I have sent Amy what I can for herself and the children."

A day or two passed, in silence on Amy's part, and anxious suspense on our's, and then one night as we were going upstairs, a carriage drove to

the door, and in a minute more poor Amy was in my father's arms. It was a miserable scene. Percy had found it utterly impossible to pay what he owed, the news of the regiment being under orders, caused the bills to shower in upon him, his father was inexorable, and he had been obliged to make his escape in the night, leaving Amy and the children to get away as best they could. She believed he had gone to France, but she had not heard of him since he left. Of course Percy must lose his commission, and what was to become of them all?

Poor Amy's distress was dreadful; the separation from her husband, and the discovery at the same moment of his habits, hitherto so sedulously concealed from her, seemed a severer trial than the total destitution in which she found herself. Perhaps she could not fully understand *that* at present. She had only brought what was absolutely necessary for herself and the children; in spite of Percy's directions to the contrary, all her expensive ornaments and wardrobe, as well as the plate, and carriages and horses had been left for the creditors.

How small my own troubles seemed to me now, when I compared them with such an overwhelming blow as had fallen upon Amy! and how thankful I felt to have been kept in ever

so small a degree from indulging a repining spirit. To have had Mr. Annesley at hand would certainly have been a great comfort. I had been so accustomed to look to him for aid, and direction, and advice in every difficulty hitherto, that at first, forgetful of the gulf which separated us, my thoughts naturally flew away to him; and I believe my father would equally have rejoiced in his being near us, for though in most emergencies he was quite equal to act for himself, he wanted now comfort as well as help, and had been so used to lean upon Mr. Annesley as upon an elder son, and to receive his sympathy, that I knew his absence must be felt by him then. When, however, my aunt suggested that he should be written to, he negatived the proposal at once; he had no right, he said, to disturb his pleasures, and had no claim upon his sympathy, indeed he hoped that no rumour of the troubles at Arden Rise would penetrate the boundaries of Calvers.

Meanwhile, it was plain that this additional sorrow was breaking my father's heart. Even Amy, unwilling as she had been to notice a change, could not help being struck by the alteration in his appearance during the last year.

However there was but little time for vain regrets; action was necessary. After a few days, some

little comfort came to Amy in the form of a letter from Percy, written from Boulogne, at least he was safe, and she was relieved from that anxiety; the next was to join him again, and submit to anything that would enable them to live together.

To effect this, my father once more made an effort to renew his acquaintance with the Everleigh Court family, and this time he met with a better reception. Notwithstanding his indignation at his son's conduct, the old man was a little softened by Amy's sufferings and earnest pleadings. The sight of his grand-children, too, opened a soft corner of his heart, and perhaps the advance of age made him less disposed to be inexorable in his wrath. Whatever the cause, he shewed kindness. The young ladies, too, relaxed from their former superciliousness—Amy had a wonderful power of winning hearts—and she was to let her twin boys be sent to Everleigh Court for a time. It was a sore parting, but she felt she must not refuse the first overtures. "So long as it was only for a visit," she said to me, "I will consent, but my fear is, they should wish to keep them."

I tried to reassure her by hinting delicately, that engaging as the young gentlemen were, I

thought a week of their society would amply satisfy the wishes of their aunts, an argument to which she was very unwilling to yield, though more amenable to reason, when I suggested that there was actual sorrow enough in her case, without going out to meet imaginary troubles, and that in the event of such a contingency occurring, it would be time enough to think of it. So the young gentlemen were dispatched to Everleigh, and I think Amy was almost as disposed to resent their being returned to her maternal arms at the stipulated period, as she would have been had a proposal of adoption arrived instead.

But while this trouble was occupying our minds at Arden Rise, a different scene was going on at Calvers, whither my thoughts, I fear, were often straying, much oftener than I liked to acknowledge, even to myself. Earnestly did I long for a few minutes of conversation with Mr. Annesley, hitherto my resource in all my perplexities. From him I had always received comfort and help, and now more than ever, I stood in need of both; for besides my sympathy with Amy and my desire to assist her in her difficulties, I felt increased anxiety about my father. I knew how keen his sufferings were, and how doubly heavy this affliction was to him, falling as it had done on Amy.

In his own person, he could have borne up against any similar trial, for he had a sure anchor from which he could not easily be driven, but in touching Amy, the barb had found his most vulnerable part, and I could see from day to day how the iron was entering into his soul, and corroding his life. Aunt Martha was not wholly insensible to this, but she too was more engrossed with Amy; and though I often heard her sigh as her eyes followed the bowed figure of my father, when with slow and even tottering step, he crossed the garden to go about his parochial duties, and we sometimes exchanged a few sorrowful words on the subject, she was more alive to anxiety on Amy's account; and indeed there was cause, for her state was one to excite the deepest compassion. Besides the uneasiness she could not put away on Percy's account, and the misery of being separated from him at such a time, there were anxieties for her children, and herself too, for she looked forward to an addition to the number at no distant period.

Again and again then, I sighed for the sweet counsels I had so often in former days, taken with that friend, from whom I must never more hope for advice or assistance; and though I had never entered the Grange grounds since the day that I

had last met him there, my heart and my eyes now often wandered in that direction. He was wholly ignorant, however, of our need of sympathy. Mrs. Aubrey and Mrs. Wilson were the only channels through which he was likely to hear anything, and on both of those we had enjoined strict secresy. A letter from Edith, when all was over, convinced me that our wishes on this point had been carefully observed.

It was written in the full glow of her pride, on finding herself at last her own mistress, and yet there was nothing offensive in all her assumption of importance. It was still the bright humming-bird, tasting nothing but sweet in everything, making others happy from the fullness of her own happiness, putting away sorrow, from her very ignorance of it, living in a perpetual glow of warm sunshine, and chasing away every cloud that approached her, not indeed absorbing them by an unselfish sympathy into the clear ether of her own heart, but, as it were, scaring them away by her brilliant joyousness. Even as I read her letter, heavy as my own heart was, I felt as if a ray of her brightness was tinging the gloomy atmosphere around me, and, for the moment, I could not help identifying myself with, and participating in her pleasure and triumph.

The next letter, however, which came before I had had time to answer the former, was read with different feelings. It announced that the guardian was merging into the husband, and though my last interview with Mr. Annesley had more than prepared me for such an announcement, like every other disaster, it fell at last unexpectedly.

In her letter, too, there was a curious mixture of contentment and dissatisfaction; a feeling was evident that he had shewn no eagerness to avail himself of the request of her father. She owned she had even been obliged, as she said, to alter the calendar for her own purposes, and advance leap-year a twelvemonth, by claiming the fulfilment of his promise, and then instead of doing so with alacrity, he still urged that she had not taken sufficient time to look round, and see if there were not some one whom she would prefer to her Guardian.

"And yet, Mabel," she went on, "who knows better than himself, that to every proposal I have had, and they have been from the titled and wealthy, too, I have never for a moment hesitated to give a decided refusal? He laughs at me, and says the right one is still to come—it may be so, but that one I know never will, never can come; and when I am married I shall have no more doubts and

anxieties. Ah, you laugh at that word, I see, but indeed, I have them, often. I am sometimes very unhappy, and I am afraid others are so too, and that—I don't know what I am afraid of, but when we are married this will all be over. And then I am so tired of my old duenna; I expected to have my own way as I had with Dame Margaret, but this old lady is always worrying me; she doesn't like this person, and that, and thinks me too childish and fond of society; and worst of all, made an attempt to banish Mingo from the house, and even send him back to Clarence. We came to high words then, for obedient and submissive as you know I am, on most occasions, I broke out into furious rebellion then, and declared that if she appealed to Gardie, (I wonder whether I should call him Ralph) and told him all about the dog, I would turn her out of the house, and do— I don't know what! However, I brought the old lady to her senses, and she is my humble servant just now. But I am to have another year of this misery, at least, for it is real misery! Gardie—Mr. Annesley—Ralph—what you will, has run away from me! He insists that I shall not marry yet; so having put every thing in order for me here, he has gone abroad, I can't tell where. Happily I am to go back

with Dame Margaret to Ireland, to pass the winter there, if I like it; and then she has promised that she and her husband, who is a good old soul, and that merry, good-natured Miss Crampton, will come and spend the spring and summer at Calvers. So now I don't care for my old duenna, and she may stay here, or go and live with her son, who she is always wanting me to invite to Calvers. Well! so I am a widow for the present; that is a widow by anticipation, and don't even know what is become of my lord and master, that is to be—I suppose he will inform me when he thinks fit, though I must own he is something of a Bashaw—and in the meantime, I am one moment the cheeriest of humming-birds, and the next—oh dear! I am very impatient to get away from Calvers. I hope Dame Margaret will go next week. But I have not told you a word about Mrs. Mainwaring, and she was the greatest fun possible! such a wardrobe as she had! and each dress more furbelowed, and flounced, and trimmed than the last! such a list of titled names as she showered on my devoted head! such flirting with that poor old Lord Ottersee, and such toadying of his pale, priggish daughter. I beg your pardon, Mabel, I did not mean to say that; she is worth more than I am; pity that Clarence

cannot be made to think so! But do you know, Mrs. Mainwaring actually broke out into an eulogium on you, and especially on your vocal powers! I know she did it chiefly to mortify me, because Gardie—(there it is again!) and some others had been complimenting me, and I was so provoked with him, for he paid her attention the whole evening afterwards; and when I said, I thought her a bore and a humbug, he had the effrontery to defend her, and say she had many good qualities, and more discrimination than he had supposed!"

Yes, from the most noxious flowers I suppose a drop of honey may be extracted, and so from among much that was bitter and poisonous to my happiness in this letter, there lay the little sugar-plum which enabled me to overcome all that had nauseated my palate. Mrs. Mainwaring had praised me; that I was quite indifferent to, for censure from her I often thought the highest praise; but because she had praised me, Mr. Annesley had been attentive to her, and had even taken up her defence; and yet, what was that to me? and what had I to do with such selfish thoughts at all now? There were real, tangible sorrows enough round me, closing in nearer and nearer, and mine was but a trifle compared with

those. This was no time to think of myself, or dwell upon what had been, or what might have been. It was perhaps a blessing that I had no other duty calling me off from those sad ones, which were pressing so earnestly upon me. But whether or not, it had been settled and arranged for me by One who knew better than myself. I was but a soldier, submission and obedience were my duties, not choice, still less murmurings. At the worst, young as I was, time was not eternity, and there was one very dear to me, who I could not but fear was drawing nearer and nearer to the verge of that bourne.

CHAPTER XI.

" Nicht frohe Zeichen sind's,
Die diesem Bündniss unsrer Herzen leuchten,
Das ist kein Schauplatz wo die Hoffnung wohnt.
Es geht ein finstrer Geist durch unser Haus,
Und schleunig will das Schicksal mit uns enden."

WALLENSTEIN'S LAGER.

I WAS indeed becoming seriously uneasy about my father, and Philip's vacation just now was a peculiar comfort to me, for Amy was too much engrossed by her own sorrow, to do more than notice the change that was working in him, as was perhaps natural. In another year, Philip would be old enough to be ordained, and, as throughout his college career hitherto, he had been a source of pride and satisfaction to my father, it was a great pleasure to have him with us now.

" My poor little sister," he said to me, one day, as we were strolling on the beach, " it is hard that

all these anxieties and worries should fall on you, who have had no share in occasioning them."

"Oh, I am not worse off than others," I replied, "perhaps not so bad, for Amy has a double, I may say a quadruple weight to bear, and I am afraid she has not your sympathy to help her, Philip."

"She has all the sympathy she deserves," he said, "I am sorry for her, but I cannot forget that her wilfulness has brought it all on herself, and on others too; and now it is plain that in her mind, herself, her respectable husband, and unfortunate children, stand out prominent as foreground figures in her landscape, and all the rest fade into an indistinct distance; she has been selfish all her life, and will go on so I am afraid, and my poor little Mabel gets pale and thin, and no one cares for her."

"Oh yes, a great many do, my dear brother," I said, assuming more cheerfulness than I felt. "Don't waste compassion upon me; I know papa loves me in a way, though he looks upon me as a sort of animal with whose precise properties he is unacquainted; then I have you and Phœbe, and a number of friends in her class, and—well, surely with all these, I am not to be pitied."

"You say nothing of Lady Ruth Aubrey, and Edith Marsh?" Philip remarked.

"And yet I don't the less think of the former as a sincere friend, but she has something of her own to contend with, and I would not draw upon her for sympathy, which I know, nevertheless, would not be withheld. As to the other, I have told you before I think her no friend, only a companion, or rather a plaything."

"Do you know, Mabel, I have a scheme in my head," Philip went on, without noticing what I had been saying. "In another year, or perhaps less, I hope to be allowed to take Holy Orders, and I have been thinking how delightful it would be, if I might be my father's curate, he wants help, and then I could come and live among you all. You don't seem enamoured of my plan, Mabel," he added, after a pause, rather reproachfully, as I continued to walk on in silence.

"The plan is a charming one, Philip, but I fear too good to be true, as the saying is," I said at last.

"You doubt my ability to pass, Mabel?" Philip asked quickly with a mortified air.

"By no means, Philip," was my reply, "but I doubt our father's wanting a curate a year hence." I added, in a lower tone. He stopped suddenly,

and placing himself before me, looked earnestly in my face, as he demanded almost fiercely,

"What can you mean, Mabel?"

"Have you not noticed his altered spirits, Philip," I asked, "his grey hairs, his tottering gait, his stooping shoulders? and do you think these are symptoms of health and longevity?"

Philip was silent; he walked on by my side with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and we neither of us spoke for some time; at last he said,

"I had not thought of this, at least not as you have put it, Mabel. I believe I did not wish to see it, but now that you have opened my eyes, it is but too plainly visible. And what then will become of you, my dear little sister, till I have a home which you can share?"

"'Always commit thy cause unto Me, I will dispose of it in due time. Wait My ordering of it, and thou shalt find it will be for thy good.'" I answered, quoting words familiar to us both. "With so dark a cloud hanging on the horizon, I dare not, cannot think of what may be beyond, but I am sure that I shall find some path marked out for me, when the time comes."

"My dear little Mabel," Philip asked, "where have you learned to practise such faith?"

"The practice remains yet to be proved, Philip," I replied, smiling, "I know that is what I firmly believe now, when called upon to act it may not be so easy."

"We are so apt to mistake our path," Philip said, musingly, "sometimes two or three seem equally eligible, and tend apparently in the same direction, and then we are called upon to exercise discretion and are apt to forget faith."

"Nay, Philip," I said, "if we had not to use our own discretion, in some degree, we should be mere automata, but if we look to the true landmarks we shall seldom fail to choose the right path; it is, I believe, more pride and impatience than real ignorance, that tempt us to choose out ways of our own, which always end by bringing us into trouble. But we need not look about us much at present, our way is sufficiently clear, and there is quite enough to give us plenty of employment."

"Enough indeed!" Philip exclaimed, "for here comes Mrs. Mainwaring to cross our path, I did not know the old hag had returned from Calvers."

It was but too true; just as we emerged from the lane which led from the beach to the village, who should we see but Mrs. Mainwaring, dressed as if for a promenade in Kensington Gardens

and picking her way along the road, which recent rain had converted into a bed of mud.

"Well, my dear Mabel!" she exclaimed as we met, "and Philip too! why really you are so grown, that in the distance I took you for Mr. Annesley, and yet I thought it was strange he should be here now. You know of course he is going to marry the heiress of Calvers, Mabel? I always knew it would be so, don't you remember my predicting it? Poor Mabel!" she added, with a malicious smile.

"Edith told me a year or two ago that she was to marry him when she was one-and-twenty," I said.

"Edith, my dear! you don't suppose he is marrying Edith, do you? Oh no! it is the heiress of Calvers that is to be his bride. But what about Amy?" she added, changing her tone, "I hear sad news in the village, is it true?"

"If you mean that Amy was induced to marry in haste that she might repent at leisure, I am afraid it is too true," Philip answered, angrily.

"Induced to marry?" she repeated, "who do you suppose induced her to do any such thing? except you mean Percy Claytoun."

"No matter who induced her," Philip replied, "it was no friend to her or to any of us."

"We had better not stand in this muddy road,"

I remarked, fearing Philip was going too far, "your shoes are too thin for such a walk Mrs. Mainwaring. Were you going to the Rectory?"

"Yes, my dear, I should like to see my old friend Amy and her dear children," she replied, as we walked on. "Amy was always a favourite of mine, and so was Percy, too, I am sorry he has turned out such a shocking man."

"You had better not call him that to Amy," I suggested laughing.

"Oh, then she really does not repent," Mrs. Mainwaring exclaimed, "I am glad to hear it, for I have just seen Mr. Claytoun; I went to the Bank on purpose; I don't think he wanted to talk about Percy, but I was determined to know what he thought of them both, and whether he would help them."

"I am afraid they must not expect more help from him," I said, "though he is very kind to Amy now."

"Oh, you are wrong there," was her reply, "I talked to him well. I told him he was a rich man, and was bound to do something for his son, an only son too, and poor Amy who was suffering from his extravagance. He looked very angry at first, but that I did not mind; if

I can help a friend, I am not afraid of a few black looks or angry words."

"Cats always know how to take care of themselves," Philip muttered, as he walked on the other side of me.

"What is that Philip is saying?" Mrs. Mainwaring asked with a sweet smile. "You think people ought to take care of themselves? But, my dears, I know perfectly well that Mr. Claytoun would not like to offend me. I have been a great friend to him, and I am determined that he shall do something for Amy and his son."

By this time we had reached the Rectory, so leaving Mrs. Mainwaring in the drawing-room, I ran up-stairs on the pretence of finding Amy, and sending the children for her to see, while Philip went into my father's study, and the duty of entertaining our guest devolved on poor Aunt Martha; for Amy was by no means so grateful for the part she had taken in her marriage as to be very anxious to renew her acquaintance, and, indeed, I found her in deep consideration of a letter from Mr. Claytoun, containing a proposal that she and Philip should go out to Canada as settlers.

He said it was out of the question to suppose that he could do anything more for Philip in this country, after having twice got him out of dif-

ficulties, and saved him from the disgrace which he had now brought upon himself at last; but he had an old friend in Canada, who had been settled there for some years, and if they would go out, Mr. Farquharson would, he was sure, receive them for the present, and put him in the way of buying an eligible lot of ground, for which, and all necessary expences, the money should be transmitted, and upon Percy's conduct would depend his father's future favour.

"What shall we do, Mabel?" Amy asked in distress. "I have no idea that Percy will consent to bury himself alive in the Backwoods, and what would become of me there? I would of course be glad to do what I could, but to be banished to America, and lead the life of a household drudge there—I could not do it!"

I said I did not suppose that Mr. Claytoun would expect an immediate acquiescence, but it would be a pity to give a decided refusal, "for, indeed, Amy, I don't see well what else you can do," I added.

"If Percy would only come back," she said, "why not remain here?"

There were only one or two things against that. First, Mr. Claytoun had made their going to Canada a condition of paying Percy's debts,

and till those were discharged he could not return to England; then, suppose he did, would our quiet life suit him? and could he bear to live dependent on one whose means were not unlimited?

"You are always thinking of yourself, Mabel," Amy said, petulantly. "I have quite as much right to share papa's home as you and Philip; besides, you have money independent of him."

"I was not exactly thinking of either myself or Philip in that sense," I replied. "But surely, Amy, you must see how much papa is broken; I sometimes fear this will not long be a home for any of us."

"That is only your croaking way," she said. "Papa is not so young as he was, to be sure; but he is likely to live many years yet, and as the living belongs to Mr. Annesley, if he is good for anything, he will give it to Philip afterwards. By the bye, Mabel, did you quarrel at last? What makes him run away from the Grange and take no notice of us now, when he might be of some use?"

I assured her there was no quarrel between us, and gave the best explanation I could of the matter. He was gone abroad, to Norway, I believed, though nobody seemed to know with certainty; at

all events he was in utter ignorance of all the trouble that had come upon us.

"I wish Percy could meet with him," was Amy's remark, "perhaps he would do something for him now, though I remember he was not very complimentary formerly in his opinion."

"And all this time we are forgetting Mrs. Mainwaring," I observed, "and victimizing poor Aunt Martha to her flounces and her *fadaises*."

"I am not going to see Mrs. Mainwaring," Amy said, "you may tell her so if you like. Oh! if she wants to see the children," she added, as I reminded her of the lady's wish, "you and Jane can take them down stairs. Stay, let me see that they are nicely dressed," and forgetting all her troubles for the moment, the mother's proud love was shewn in choosing out their prettiest frocks and broad pink sashes, and smoothing their glossy heads.

"It is a large demand upon your affection all at once, Amy," I remarked, laughing as she took them alternately in her arms, "I wonder which will be the favourite," I added, rather pursuing my own thoughts than addressing her.

"Whichever gives me the most trouble, I suppose," she answered gaily; "that is generally the rule here below, I believe, according to your creed,

at least. Tell Mrs. Mainwaring," she went on as she placed the youngest in my arms, "she cannot do better than provide for this little gentleman, I had him named Arden, so she may take the compliment to herself."

"I wish you had not given them both surnames," I said.

"And why pray?" asked Amy, "are not Percy and Arden far prettier names than Tom and Dick?"

"Yes, undoubtedly, but you were not limited to those," I replied laughing, "and I like the idea of a real Christian name, shewing that they are members of Christ, better than a surname which might belong to a Turk, or a heathen."

"You are a fanciful creature, Mabel," Amy observed, "and have picked up some odd Old-World notions in that gloomy Grange library. Ah! and that reminds me," she added with a sigh, and a change of tone, "that I must turn my thoughts to this question of the New World. I will go down and talk to papa."

It was not a thing to be easily decided, and it was long before either Amy or my father could bring themselves even to look the matter steadily in the face. Amy had, indeed, expressed herself, at first, willing to make any sacrifice, or to go any

where, so that she and Percy might be united again. But I think in making this declaration, her thoughts had not gone beyond a pretty thatched cottage, in some retired village not far from Winterford, where they might live economically on an allowance from Mr. Claytoun; or, perhaps, some romantic and secluded residence in a part of the European continent remote from the sophisticating influence of English travellers, might have been her day dream. From remarks that she made occasionally, I think some such ideas filled her imagination, but Amy was always the most unpractical person. She had been content during their prosperity to squander money recklessly, without even an inquiry as to the source or extent of their means, and now she had not the smallest conception of what ruin meant.

Finding herself in her old comfortable home, with all reasonable wants supplied, she imagined it would be the easiest thing possible to continue the same life in a home of her own, utterly overlooking the habits of both Percy and herself, and taking it for granted that they would be able to manage their small household economically, enjoy society, and give up, at the same time, all the luxuries they had indulged in, without a regret.

All her trouble was, the present separation from Percy; could he be in any way brought to England, or she join him in France, all her difficulties, she thought, would be ended. Mr. Claytoun's proposal, therefore, came upon her like a thunder-clap when the sky is cloudless, and she was wholly unable to comprehend it.

To my father, of course, the question presented itself in a different light. In fact with him it could hardly be called a question. He saw, clearly, the necessity of accepting the only terms on which they could expect aid from Mr. Claytoun, who alone could help them. He knew the home at the Rectory could not last for ever, and he had been too faithful a Pastor to have saved much out of his small living, either for present expences or future portions for his children; but yet the prospect of separation from his darling Amy, I am sure, added many a line to his countenance; and had he been younger, or less infirm, rather, than he had become during the last year or two, or had Philip been a little nearer the time of his ordination, I think he would even have given up Arden Rise, and accompanied the Claytouns into exile; but that was not to be thought of now; the present question was, how he could bring himself to acquiesce in the plan, which he could

not but see was the only chance of reclaiming Percy, and, at the same time, how long he could defer its execution. Of course he could not think of Amy's going out till after her confinement, and that would not be before December, and indeed all that interval would be necessary for the arrangement of the preliminaries, as Mr. Claytoun had to write to his friend Mr. Farquharson in Canada, and negociate with him for the reception of the family, and his aid in purchasing a farm, either partially or wholly cleared, in the neighbourhood of his own. It was also needful to make some settlement with the creditors so as to enable Percy to return to England, and on every account, some little time must elapse before the final parting could take place. I don't think we any of us thoroughly understood what that parting would really be.

CHAPTER XII.

" Chastened and schooled at last,
No more, no more, my struggling spirit burns,
But fixed on Thee, from that wild worship turns.
What have I said?—The deep dream is not past!"

HEMANS.

So time went on, not with his former brisk, buoyant step, but sadly and heavily, and yet making such long, giant-like strides, that the month or two which must intervene before the family once more broke up, seemed diminishing with startling rapidity.

Edith wrote frequently, in spite of the silence on my part. I dared not send her long letters in return, for my object was to keep her in ignorance of the real state of things at Arden Rise. I was so afraid our troubles should reach Mr. Annesley's ears, and though from what she said, I had no reason to think that the correspondence between them was at all regular, I knew the secret once

in her hands, there was little chance of its being preserved. So I only mentioned, in general terms, that Amy and the children were with us, and would remain till after her confinement. Earnestly as I yearned for the support and consolation that Mr. Annesley would have been to me, and to my father at this time, I equally shrunk from claiming his sympathy, or, what I felt would be equivalent to making a claim, suffering him to know that we were in trouble. Claim, indeed, I could no longer be said to have, Edith alone had that privilege now; compassion I did not like, least of all from Mr. Annesley. I was humble enough in many things, but pride still reared its head sometimes; and besides, when I thought of our last interview, and when could I be said not to be thinking of it? there came a throb of my heart and a glow into my cheeks, which made me shrink from the least appearance of seeking him.

Edith was in Ireland now, with the Cramptons, so news from Arden Rise was not likely to reach her, except through me, but notwithstanding the brevity of my replies, there was no difference in the length of her letters. Some would think this was a proof of her friendship. I did not think so; I thought it arose from the necessity of pouring out the innumerable small things which occupied

her mind, and also from a desire evident though unexpressed, to hear something about Clarence, to talk of him, and to ascertain how he took the fact of her engagement; and this she supposed, from the neighbourhood of the Knoll, I might in some way learn from his mother, and transmit to her.

If this were her wish, however, it was never gratified by me. Mrs. Aubrey was not likely to make me a confidante on the subject in the first place, besides I was too jealous for Ruth, and too angry with the little Humming-bird for her coquetry with Clarence, to flatter her vanity with tales of his despair.

Perhaps there were other reasons which caused me to take pleasure in ignoring a wish, that I had no intention of indulging, so I met all her cunningly devised snares, by a stolid silence on the subject, which effectually baffled her.

I was poring over one of these voluminous effusions in the recess of the drawing-room window, when Philip joined me.

"What a correspondent the little Humming-bird is!" he exclaimed, "why that is the third folio I have seen in your hands during the fortnight that I have been at home; are your replies equally extensive, Mabel? and if so, what can you find to write about?"

"I have written but twice to her," I replied, in a tone of indifference, "and my letters were very brief, I am not so full of words as Edith is."

"Or ideas, perhaps," Philip smilingly suggested. "You cannot mean that even a young lady can fill so many sheets with mere words?"

"To find one grain of sense, you would have to winnow a bushel of chaff," I said. "Humming-birds are not made for philosophy you know, Philip, and certainly the flight of the one in question will never be impeded by anything so solid."

"You are always very bitter against that pretty little creature, Mabel. She may not, indeed, be a Sir Isaac Newton, but she is a charming little thing, and if I had time to fall in love just now, I don't know any one with whom I should be so ready to do it."

"Have a care, Philip," I answered, "you would only share the fate of Clarence, most probably; be trifled with till she was tired, and then flung aside. It is settled too now, that she is to marry Mr. Annesley."

"Edith Marsh marry Mr. Annesley?" Philip repeated, with more earnestness of manner than I thought the subject called for. "What a sacrifice!"

"For him, yes, I quite agree with you," was my

eager reply. "And I am sure he must think so too. What possible companionship or sympathy can there be between them?"

"None," Philip said, in a grave, low tone. "But I consider the sacrifice wholly on her side; he has evidently taken advantage of her position."

"Oh, how little you know him!" I exclaimed, unable to command myself. "How cruel to judge where you have no means of observation! and yet, thus will all the world judge, and condemn him."

"And you think yourself better informed than all the world, it seems, Mabel?" Philip observed, drily. "but what is there unnatural in the constant association that has existed between them for so many years, ending in his loving her? Why should he be blind to charms, which are so winning to others? for I will not do him the injustice to hint at pecuniary advantages. I think him above that."

"There at least you are right, Philip," I answered, with difficulty restraining my tears; "I know some are ignorant and wicked enough to attribute even that base design to him. But, setting aside that, Mr. Annesley is not one to be attracted by mere pretty, winning, coquettish ways;

he looks deeper, and would seek better qualities in a companion—in a wife."

"Some of the wisest men, nevertheless, have married the silliest women," Philip argued, "and as a case in point comes the fact you have just mentioned, that Ralph Annesley is engaged to Edith Marsh; not that I am by any means disposed to acknowledge her silly, except for argument's sake, on the contrary, I think she has quite sense enough to be able to dispense with beauty, if the two are incompatible. Were I not in pursuit of a graver and more exacting mistress just now, I declare, in spite of the engagement, I would myself break a lance for the pretty Edith."

"I don't think your rival would be earnest enough in the cause, to win the battle," I said, inadvertently.

"What, Mabel, is he a careless lover?" Philip asked, with eagerness; "worse and worse! In that case, perhaps, the world takes a truer view of him than I do."

"He would never be careless," I said, "but he must see that she is no fit wife for him, that is—" I blundered on, getting into a maze of difficulties, and not knowing how to extricate myself, and at the same time preserve my own secret and shield

Mr. Annesley from blame. "You know he could not help himself. It was her father's wish, if, on her attaining one and twenty, she should not object."

"Poor Edith!" exclaimed Philip, thoughtfully, turning towards the window. "What a sacrifice! I may well repeat. She was one and twenty last month, I think," he added, as he walked away whistling.

"Oh, Philip, how unjust you are!" I exclaimed, while I covered my face with my hands, and tried to stifle the angry feelings which swelled in my heart.

That it was possible such things should be said of one so noble; so indifferent to riches; so generous and unselfish; so honourable in the way in which he had discharged the trust committed to him; of one who had given up his own home, and his whole life to the education of this fluttering butterfly! I knew he did not love her. I knew that he would prefer the Grange, even with utter poverty, to Calvers, with the wealth of Crœsus. I knew—at least I thought—no, it was not love that he felt for me, only strong interest, deep compassion—I was not worthy of him, and sure I was, that Edith was even less so; for she was totally unable to appreciate the firm, delicate qualities of

such a heart, or the rich treasures of such a mind. One like Clarence, who cared for little beyond sporting, and amusement, and gaiety, would be much more suited to her; and after all, by her own confession, she had been the wooer rather than the wooed, though it was not even for love of him that she had stepped down from her pride of place. Yet the world, looking on from a distance, presumed to judge between them, calling him designing and avaricious, and converting her into a victim! "Oh, it is too cruel, too unjust!" I exclaimed again, and pride and anger resolved themselves into large tears, which slowly and heavily forced their way between the fingers that were closely pressed over my eyes.

Hours seem as minutes when any violent passion agitates the soul, and such was my state then. It was only the evening prayer bell which roused me from the dream I had fallen into; a dream in which was traced my whole life, from the days of childhood, when, seated in the Oriel window of the Grange library with Mr. Annesley by my side, I was his docile and attentive pupil, to the day when I had sat there last with him for my companion, and words had burst from me, half uttered feelings, which had met with no response, and I had learned from his own lips that Edith's image occupied the

heart in which I would fain have had my own enshrined. It was a sad retrospect, and yet there were gleams of brightness shining athwart it—rays of glory lighting up the gloom from time to time, evanescent, uncertain, brief and variable, but worth whole years of common-place happiness. It was by these that I had measured my real life, not by the years that had passed over my head; but now my calendar was exhausted, my sun had set, and only a polar night of gloom and darkness was before me; irradiated it might be from time to time by a pale auroral light, but never more to be warmed by the glowing beams of the sun itself.

These were some of my hours of despondency; such will occasionally come over us when excitement of any kind has passed away, and our dazzled optics have not yet, so to speak, accustomed themselves to the change—our spirits have not had time to regain their tone. They were not frequent with me, nor did they last long; my temperament was by nature hopeful, and I never willingly yielded to gloom; if circumstances overwhelmed, and pressed down my spirit for a time, it seemed to rise only the stronger and the more elastic, the moment the weight was even partially removed.

I think it will always be found that the temperament corresponds wonderfully with the cir-

cumstances of life. A person who is blessed from early years with one of those buoyant, elastic, hopeful spirits, not easily downcast, and ready in an instant to rise again to the surface, we may generally suppose, with tolerably accuracy, will have much to encounter in life; not perhaps great or overwhelming sorrows, but continual trials, such as are the more difficult to bear, because they are not considered legitimately entitled to sympathy from the multitude, but must be met and dealt with, and overcome in silence. A desponding and easily depressed spirit will be found to have seldom more to contend against than imaginary troubles or those of its own making, but if sorrow does fall upon it, as sometime or other probably it must, it will come most likely in that overwhelming form which draws largely on the commiseration and support of others; and on the strength of this great misfortune, the sufferer may trade successfully and creditably to the end of life; though it is not to a temperament of this desponding kind that I should ever look for sympathy in trouble, great or small; its own real or fancied misfortunes are as much as it can deal with. A buoyant and hopeful spirit is indeed a blessing beyond price and not to the possessor alone. But by buoyant and hopeful, I mean not, frivolous and heedless—the distinction though

often overlooked is as great as between unselfish and selfish.

It was this happy spirit of elastic hopefulness, that had borne me through the many depressing circumstances of my early life, and had enabled me to be an aid and a comfort to others in times of trouble; it gave me the power not only of putting aside present difficulties till a more convenient season, but helped me to discover rays of hope and even happiness, where others often looked for them in vain, and to be useful and cheerful (mirthful was never my characteristic) where many could only sit down and weep under the weight of their burden. It was the power of always finding a bright side to every picture; seeing a silver lining in every cloud—hoping, trusting, and in the words of the adage, believing, that there is nothing so bad, but it might be worse.

To nature and good health I was indebted no doubt for much of this great blessing, but I had early been taught to add to, and strengthen it by faith—the belief that every event of our life is over-ruled by God.

"The darts of anguish fix not, where the seat
Of suffering has been thoroughly fortified,
By acquiescence in the Will supreme

For time and for eternity; by Faith,
Faith absolute in God, including Hope,
And the defence that lives in boundless love
Of His perfections."

I am afraid all this sounds very egotistical, but it was one of those precious lessons which had been imbibed while sitting in that Oriel window at the Grange. Could it be forgotten? had not all that I had learned there, but grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength?

Alas! indeed for some that had!

CHAPTER XIII.

"I come
To this sweet place for quiet. Every tree
And bush, and fragrant flower, and hilly path,
And thorny mound, that flings unto the winds
Its morning incense, is my friend."

BARRY CORNWALL.

NOVEMBER came and went, and our horizon seemed to get darker and darker. Mr. Claytoun's proposal had received full consideration and was thought by all but Amy, and perhaps, my father, too advantageous to be discarded. I say, "perhaps my father," for though outwardly he acquiesced and acknowledged its eligibility, I knew full well the internal struggle that it cost him. Between the sale of Percy's property, and Amy's jewels, and his own assistance, Mr. Claytoun had arranged so that all the debts were paid, and Percy was free to return home. We were all doing our best to help in preparing what was

necessary to send them out comfortably. Mr. Claytoun had heard from his friend Mr. Farquharson, who had met his proposal most hospitably, and was already looking out for something in his own neighbourhood that would be desirable, so it was settled that as soon as Amy was able to undertake the journey after her confinement, they should go.

This gave us a prospect of being together for at least two months; Percy was come over, and we were all more or less endeavouring to cast care behind us, to rejoice in the present, and either feel or feign belief that sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. But it seemed as if happiness was not to be our's any longer. Scarcely had the month of December set in, when a heavier misfortune occurred than any which had befallen us. In going one inclement evening to soothe the dying bed of a distant parishioner, my father took a violent cold. He was unwilling at first to give it the care it required, and when he found himself no longer able to struggle against it, the complaint had taken a deeper hold on his already impaired constitution than he supposed, he had no longer power to wrestle with the consequent debility, and at the end of ten days he was no more.

Over this sad period I must draw a curtain.

No length of time can obliterate, though it may soften the recollection of the sorrow that overwhelmed us all; there had been so little to warn us of the sword impending over our heads, for in spite of the apprehensions which I had both felt and expressed, my fears had been but vague and floating, I had never thoroughly realized to myself the fact; and it fell with a crushing weight upon my heart.

How bitterly I reproached myself for opportunities neglected, now, never to be recalled, when I might have shewn more devotion, more tenderness; how overpoweringly came the recollection of the many times when I had vexed and grieved him, the impatience, the jealousy, I had both felt and shewn; the selfishness I had indulged! It is not till death has thus set his seal upon the past, that we really understand the privileges wasted, the occasions thrown away, the many sins of omission and commission which at once start up in such fearful magnitude before us, and we feel that for these there remains no place for repentance, seek we it never so carefully with tears.

But as I said before, I will not drag now from their deep recesses, griefs too sacred, too poignant to be exposed to the gaze of others. It was a

sorrow in which we could all participate, though, perhaps, not equally. Happily, perhaps, for Amy, the obtuseness which had blinded her to the previous breaking up of the strong man, prevented her seeing her own share in that decay, and there were too many objects now, among whom her affections were shared, to allow of her feeling the loss as she might formerly have felt it. Before her lay a future, chequered indeed, with sunshine and shade, but naturally engrossing much of her thoughts. She had a husband, who, among many faults, mingled at least the redeeming virtue of a tender love for his wife; and children who more than filled every spare corner of her heart. Perhaps, on none of the group did the blow fall heavier than on me, for it deprived me at once of a parent and a home. Philip was the only one to whom I could look for sympathy, but beyond that—and it was much—he had nothing to offer, and not even from him could I receive all the commiseration I so much needed; for he knew not the full extent of my desolation, he dreamt not of the beloved friend, whose loss had preceded and been only inferior to my present one.

Aunt Martha had another home, which she had only left to oblige my father and serve

us, and this home she kindly invited me to share; but when all was over—my dear father laid in the sunny, picturesque churchyard which he had so often crossed in the daily performance of his duties, and beneath the mossy turf of which he was now left, with so many of his valued parishioners to await the making up of the heavenly jewels—I felt that there was but one course for me, and that my home was no longer on this side the Atlantic.

The division of the small savings which my father had been able to lay by, was soon effected; there was not enough to raise the demon of cupidity among us. My own share, I at once gave over to Philip; and now what tie remained to me in England? Arden Rise would soon be the residence of a stranger, and all that I loved, and that had made my home so dear, was in some way or other torn from me. Yes, I would accompany Amy to Canada, share what hardships she might have to encounter, help to support her under sorrow, and partake in her joys. I had now, of course, possession of my godfather's legacy; this was, doubtless, the time my father had anticipated, when he said that I should one day be thankful that he had not permitted me to apply it to any purpose

previously. It had already enabled me to assist Philip, who in another year would be in a position probably to obtain a provision for himself; what could I do better with the legacy itself, than make Amy an equal sharer, at least in the little income it would produce? This was the first moment that I had felt anything but regret, deep regret for the absence of Mr. Annesley, now I almost rejoiced in it. Had he been near me as of old, it would have been to him that I should have looked for advice, and now I had decided and acted from the dictates of my own heart alone, and yet I felt sure in entire coincidence with what he would have suggested and approved. I felt too a throb of proud satisfaction in the idea that in thus expatriating myself, I might, perhaps, remove a difficulty from his path, and so in some degree render back a little of the kindness he had bestowed upon the lonely child Mabel.

Of course we were not without plenty of sympathy. All our neighbours were kind, the poor as well as the rich; the former gave us warm commiseration and what little tokens of affection and respect they had to offer, the latter opened their houses to us, and at the Knoll, Arden House, or Alverstoke Park, we might have found a home. The Grange was the only place whose gates re-

mained inhospitably closed; once, they would have been the first opened to us.

Edith wrote affectionately, and with as much sympathy as she was capable of. She was in Ireland, and her letter was a curious mixture of a wish to express kind feeling with us, and an irrepressible desire to beguile our grief, as she said, by detailing her amusements, her impressions of the people around her, with all their entertaining characteristics, and even her gaieties. She conveyed many kind messages from Dame Margaret, and wondered much what charm Mr. Annesley could find in the difficulties and privations he was encountering in his voluntary exile, that should make him prefer it to the pleasures of Calvers, where she longed to return, for she was beginning to get very tired of Ireland. Colonel Crampton's place, she said, was so out of the world; she wanted to hear of many of her friends; neither Lady Ruth nor Mrs. Aubrey ever wrote to her, and but for Mingo and Dame Margaret she should be in danger of forgetting them all. To be sure she had sometimes long letters from Gardie, but they were so full of things she neither understood nor cared about, that they were not very interesting, and it was such hard work to answer them, for though he was very good-natured,

and put up with all her little flightinesses, and rallied her, and wrote so kindly and affectionately to her, she thought now and then, he must be bored by her letters and, perhaps, by herself too. Occasionally she had thought—well no matter what—she had done just what her papa had wished, and as soon as she was married and settled at Calvers, she and Mingo would be as happy as the day was long.

Ruth wrote in a very different strain, and to many, her expressions might have seemed too measured and constrained; but I knew well the earnestness of that character, which resembled rather the deep, still pool, upon whose noiseless waters only a solitary bubble, rising from time to time silently to the surface, tells of the life and energy below, than the shallow brooklet as it rushes onward, babbling loudly of its whereabout. This depth and strength of character seemed, indeed, ever to be gaining more force; and if deeds of startling heroism were to be expected in those unheroic days, before war had awakened to action the energetic spirits who were then but slumbering, it was to Lady Ruth, and others like her, that one would look for their performance.

Even Mrs. Mainwaring appeared in another light, as she crossed the shadow that enveloped

the Rectory in such darkness. She forgot to irritate, and shewed real kindness and unaffected concern for us. She was anxious to be of use in innumerable ways, and had cleverness and experience that made her assistance really valuable; while we had the pleasant assurance, that in accepting her services, we were at the same time conferring equal benefit on ourselves and her; for, to give her the opportunity of displaying aptitude for business, and other capabilities, on the possession of which she piqued herself, was undoubtedly a kindness to her.

If employment have really any power to charm grief and make us forget its existence, then surely we had no right to be cast down, for there was plenty of occupation of all sorts, and from morning to night all were fully engaged; but much of it was the saddest of all employment, preparation for the abandonment of a cherished home, valued friends, fondest associations, and the going forth into a new country without one dear recollection; a little family of exiles, driven from our paradise to earn our bread in the sweat of the brow. Even to inanimate objects at such a time, how fondly the heart clings! how many memories were hung on to mere pieces of homely furniture; things that a stranger would have

passed by as utterly worthless, but which to us were full of pleasant reminiscences. Especially endeared to me were the little table and chair which my father had always occupied in the drawing-room, and these, with many other things too much associated with the past to be parted with, Mrs. Mainwaring kindly undertook to keep till we might claim them again, or at least till Philip had some place to put them in. The rest was left, in the hope that the new Rector might be content to purchase what he found there, with a promise from Mrs. Mainwaring that whatever was rejected should be bought for Philip.

And now the time approached when we were to turn our backs for ever on this dear home. Amy's confinement was over, and with her little girl she was strong enough to undertake the voyage. The month of February had set in with all its mild delicious softness, reminding one of the return of warmth and beauty, and beguiling even the trees and flowers to bud forth, forgetful of the bitter winds and nipping frosts lying in wait for them in March, which, like an unkind world, so often destroys with its chilling gales, the sweet hopes and anticipations formed in the more genial February of youth.

How warm was the yellow glow of the sunlight,

resting on the fresh green turf of my father's grave! there, already the daisies were beginning to lift up their bright hopeful eyes. Even the flower-garden of the Rectory, neglected as it had been of late, seemed eager to win back some of the attention it had once received, and decked itself with the pure, white, graceful snowdrop, the rich variety of crocus, the bright pink and blue of the hepatica, and here and there a sweet, pale, precious primrose. How many tales each flower had to tell! how many tears I could willingly have shed over them! It was indeed a heart-rending separation. Then there were all our poor people in the village, who had known us from infancy, and each of whom acquired additional interest in the parting hour. One day I gave up to a ramble along the beach, and a visit to the old fisherman and his wife, whose grief knew no bounds at the prospect of losing us all. There were cherished recollections connected with those rocks, and the never-to-be-forgotten storm. And lastly came the Grange. It was the first time I had entered the grounds, since that memorable day when I had met Mr. Annesley there; but I could not go without once more looking round the old place, sitting in the Oriel window, reading the names of all those books

which had been companions and witnesses of so much happiness; strolling along the terrace and recalling the evening when we all sat together in the summer-house listening to the 'Legend of the Dark Ladie;' then came the little episode of the walk home, and the enamelled pin, and memory led me far away from the present time.

I sat beneath the old Scotch firs, and thought of the thunder-storm, and the dove which had sheltered in my bosom; my return home, and the happy time that followed. The spirit of him who had been my earliest and most treasured friend pervaded every spot and every object; and as the evening shadows gathered in that antique library, I threw myself into the chair he usually occupied, and yielding to the feelings that nearly overpowered me, leaned my head upon the table, and shed some of the bitterest tears that had fallen from my eyes, since that sad day when my father was carried to his grave.

The daylight waned and faded, and still I sat there, listening to the faint hooting of the owls, and the gentle sighing of the wind along the passages; forgetful of the present almost, and carried back to the days when Mr. Annesley had so often sat beside me, kindly cheering on the dull child, giving her sweet words of encouragement, patiently

listening to, and smoothing away her difficulties and perplexities, elevating her heart to nobler and loftier thoughts, and leading her to see in all things the overruling Providence of Him, in Whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.

Bright, bright, happy days! which come before me now in this distant land, like the sweet breath of the summer breeze, laden with the rich perfumes of flowers, and bearing on its wings, distant murmurings of softest music. Oh! how full was my whole heart of these cherished memories that evening, the last I spent in my native village; almost the last I passed in my native land. How bitter, how impossible it seemed to tear myself from that spot! Sometimes, as I sat there in the gloaming, fancy beguiled me, and I almost thought I heard his footsteps in the passage. Once I thought it must be more than imagination, and I raised my head, and fixed my eyes upon the door, and listened, till my very heart seemed to stand still with the intensity of my earnestness. In vain! it was but some sound in the distance, perhaps Mrs. Wilson, making her evening round to see that all was safe. Again I laid my head down upon the table, again to be disturbed, as the breeze waved the loose boughs of

the creepers and they tapped against the window panes. I know not when I should have had resolution to say farewell to the old place, but for the actual entrance of Mrs. Wilson, who started on seeing my dark figure in her master's chair. At first, I believe she really took me for a wanderer from the land of spirits, till the sound of my voice reassured her.

"Well, to be sure, Miss," she exclaimed, "who would have thought of finding you here at this time of night? I was sure it was my master; it was the very place and attitude I always found him in, only the last time he were at home, whenever I came in to close the windows at night."

"I am afraid he was bidding the old place good bye, Mrs. Wilson, as I am," I observed; "and now I must say good bye to you too, though, when I am across the ocean, my spirit will often fly back to this dear spot; so don't be frightened if you find me here sometimes," I added, affecting a gaiety which was very far from real.

"God bless you, Miss Mabel, wherever you go," the good woman replied in a voice which trembled slightly. "There's more than me, I believe, as would gladly see you here always, body and spirit too, but our fate is not in our own hands."

"Well for us, perhaps, that it is not, or we

should more often mar our happiness than make it, wise as we think ourselves, dear Mrs. Wilson," I rejoined, as I shook her warmly by the hand.

"Well, Miss, it's not often you come here now, and the place has got a deserted look like of late, that it never used to have," she replied, sighing, as she gazed round the dusky apartment. "But it's a dreary thought, that you'll may be never come here again, and I can hardly believe it."

"Who knows how soon I may return, Mrs. Wilson?" I exclaimed, thinking to cheer the good woman, "but at all events, in less than a year, perhaps, Mr. Annesley will come again, and then the Grange will look like itself."

"Not in master's eyes any more than in mine, Miss, it's my belief, if you're still away. He's never had the same cheery, glad spirit since Miss Edith come here, and now there's the talk of their marriage. I don't know how it's all to end."

"Any more than I know how I shall get back to the Rectory, if I stand here gossipping with you, so good bye, once more, Mrs. Wilson," and with a heavy, aching heart, I turned quickly away, lest the smiles, behind which I had masked my real feelings, should turn to tears before I could be alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

"What binds the exile to his home?
Regretful memories that come
With images of love, to dwell
By some known tree, or native well."

CATHEDRAL.

Oh the dreariness of that voyage! not made in one of the spacious steamers fitted up with every luxury, and affording ample room for exercise, and every other enjoyment compatible with such a state of existence. Mr. Claytoun, severe to the last, even in his kindness, insisted that his son should share the lot of other exiles, so we were cooped up in a small sailing vessel, bound for Canada, and could only consider ourselves fortunate in not being condemned to one of the regular passenger ships, filled to overflowing, as we saw one, with emigrants of the lowest description. There were only two or three passengers, besides ourselves, in our vessel, one young man working

his way out, and a couple, not very long married, who shared our accomodations, which under the circumstances were comfortable enough, though sadly confined for the poor children, who were always tumbling over coils of rope, or ship's buckets, or falling down the companion-stairs, keeping us in continual agitation during their waking hours, and so at least contributing towards the banishment of the demon ennui, so ready to seize on unfortunate individuals imprisoned as we were.

People complain of the weariness of a sea voyage, and with reason doubtless, though to me, passionately as I love old Ocean, it was not often that I felt the tedium for myself. I was glad to be able to sit still and think, and in spite of the season, the chief of the day was spent by me on deck, wrapped up in warm cloaks and shawls, and almost heedless of the cold, when the sun shone brightly and the swelling waves were tinged with innumerable hues, now green, now purple, now a pale lilac, as its beams were crossed by cloud shadows of more or less intensity.

Strange fish and birds interested me as they came about our ship, then other vessels would pass near us; I liked to learn from the sailors to recognize each peculiar rig, and whence they came and whither they were bound. There was plenty

of employment too in taking care of the children, and helping Amy in various ways, and then there was Percy to amuse, or rather try to amuse, for it was not an easy task; cards and billiards had so long been a necessary part of his existence, and these were now, of course, out of the question. Books did not long beguile him, and chess was the only resource left.

There were many days when even I could not brave the weather on deck, and some, when we could not leave our berths; but in spite of discomfort and much that was dreary and dispiriting, the impression that remains upon my mind generally, of the five weeks' incarceration in that small ship, is of calm pleasure, opportunity of seeing nature in one of her wildest and most imposing forms, and time to look back on the past; to dwell upon the various incidents of my life, not altogether in a spirit of vain musing, but with a wish to extract honey, and failing that, at least to gather wax or farina from the flowers, sweet or noxious, that had strewed my path, hitherto; and to convert all that I thus collected into something that might be useful, with which to store a "hive for wintry hours." There was a future also to be faced, vague and undefined at present, in which but few familiar faces could be discerned; exertions

to be made, and difficulties to be encountered; to meet all which, it would be needful, sedulously to cultivate cheerfulness and content. Many a time did the well known features of those who had been my former companions flit before me, and seem to hold communnion sweet with me, as, in calm weather, I either paced the deck in the gloaming, or sat by the taffrail, looking out over the vast world of waters, and watching the majestic waves, as they advanced and surged past our small vessel,—such a speck compared with the space around us; or at other times braved the shower of spray as we cut through the billows, when now and then a larger one would rise beneath the bows, and with a hissing sound fling its sparkling foam over the deck, deluging us with water.

"The dead, the distant then," were near me, and none of the latter so often as Mr. Annesley, but I could not continue the lines. There was no joy to be softened, and sorrow connected with him, was losing every trace of sweetness. Surely, I thought, he must have heard of our trials and all the affliction into which we had been plunged. Distant as he might be, and few and irregular as his correspondents were, the news must have reached him, and he might have had time, one would think, to come to us. He who had always professed

so much fondness for my father, to make no effort to reach home when he heard of his illness, to send no word of sympathy, to think of nothing but his own pleasure! Was this indeed the end of all his professions, and had Edith absorbed all his interest? And my unguarded folly on the last evening that we met, came back to my mind with redoubled bitterness; I pictured him triumphing over the poor silly Mabel, who had mistaken compassion for love, and fearing to come to us with offers of service in our distress, lest she should construe the kindness into an expression of deeper, fonder feelings.

It was not always thus that memory brought him before me, but I was gradually learning to look upon him as indifferent, and myself as vain and presumptuous; first, in learning to love, and then in expecting to be loved. No, it was but pity originally, then pleasure at the progress I made under his tuition, then pride in the result of his pains and care, and at last, surprise mingled with gratification, when my tardily developed musical gifts burst upon him. And I had been weak and vain enough to give it all another interpretation, and to believe that the dull, shy, repulsive-mannered child could receive the rich gift of that kind and generous heart.

Well, it was over now—we were separated, never probably to meet again. He would be happy and prosperous, with Edith for his wife and Calvers for his possession, and I should struggle on, and toil through life as best I might, grateful ever to him, for the cultivation he had bestowed on my heart and mind, and thankful, that at least I had been spared the mortification of hearing from his own lips, expressions of love, which perhaps as time wore on, I should have found to be but pity. I would not try to forget him altogether, but I would endeavour to root up carefully all love for him, beyond what I might feel for an elder brother.

It was towards the middle of April, when we found ourselves at last floating up the mighty stream of the St. Lawrence. The passage had been a long one, even for a sailing vessel, but I believe none of us had been very impatient to arrive at the end of it. Percy seemed utterly careless of the future; the life that was before him—deprived of all his former companions, of all luxuries, and perhaps even comforts—nothing but labour, to which he was wholly unused, with no prospect of relaxation—was but a melancholy picture for one like him to contemplate, and I thought both Amy and myself had more of the energy so necessary to the emigrant, than he, who was to be our support and staff.

Coming in sight of land on the American coast too, has not the same interest as is felt on approaching other continents; the flat, distant shores of the St. Lawrence, itself only a miniature sea, convey so little idea of the termination of the voyage. After a time, however, the river began gradually to contract, the long lines of distant pine-clad hills drew nearer, the white specks were seen to be houses: then came cultivation, and the fragrance of trees just bursting into leaf was wafted across the waters, birds and insects of various kinds, came out to look at the fresh importation from the old country; now and then a curious, inquisitive bee was beguiled from his ordinarily unremitting toil, to flit across and give us a look, and go back buzzing, as it seemed, to his companions, describing perhaps, in bee language, the unfortunate emigrants, who looked so weary of their long confinement and envied him the tiny wings, which bore him so swiftly back again to resume his cheerful labour.

There was no time now for musings, sad or mirthful. Curiosity was awake; everything in the new country had an interest; each island that we passed and longed in vain to land upon, was scanned with eager eyes.

About a week after entering the gulf we ar-

rived at Quebec, standing so commandingly on the lofty rock, from which one obtains such a superb view of the surrounding country. Then, Montreal, so appropriately named with its diadem-like rock, towering regally indeed, above the group of islands clustering about it. Here we landed, and took a final leave of the vessel which had brought us from England; the last link was severed then, which seemed to connect us with the old country. The rest of our journey was performed, sometimes by coach, sometimes in the river steamboats, whose dimensions and arrangements filled our unaccustomed eyes with as much wonder, as the singular individuals who composed the ever-shifting crowds which covered their decks.

Could we have forgotten that our exile was neither temporary nor voluntary, even the difficulties and inconveniences we had to submit to, would have been pleasurable; the entire novelty which surrounded us, the style and manner of the people, so different from what we had been used to, and the interest and beauty of the scenery through which we passed, would have compensated for the loss of our old world accommodations; but notwithstanding our best efforts to meet discomforts cheerfully, I don't think any of us could be

said to enjoy that journey, and the charge of the three children, devolving as it did of course, entirely on Amy and myself, did not leave us either much time or inclination to indulge in admiration of the picturesque.

But I need not trace our journey step by step; it is a path which has been too often trodden by emigrants like ourselves, as well as by pleasure seekers and other travellers, not to be familiar to most, by description if not in reality. We reached at last the hospitable home of the kind friends, to whom Mr. Claytoun had, as it were, consigned us; and after a few days rest, Mr. Farquharson introduced Percy to the farm which he had purchased for him, and which adjoined their own; though we were not allowed to take possession of it, till we had spent many weeks with our new friends, and so become, in some degree, initiated into the new life we were to enter upon; so different from that we had any of us been hitherto accustomed to.

It is now more than a year, since we received this hospitable welcome to the country, henceforth to be our home. During that interval changes have occurred, sorrow has again overtaken us and once more we are the guests of our kind friends; but

I must not wholly skip over the circumstances which have made us so.

For a time all things seemed to go on prosperously. The farm which Mr. Farquharson had purchased for us, had been already partially cleared and brought into cultivation, which of course was a manifest advantage; the former owner had removed to another district, and in rather more than a month after our arrival, we took possession. At first, Percy seemed to enter with wonderful spirit into the new life; he worked indefatigably with his labourers, received and adopted willingly the advice of his kind neighbour, and in all things, accommodated himself cheerfully and readily to the novel position in which he found himself.

There was only a log hut on the settlement, but it was May, summer was before us, and we felt careless about our personal comfort, while there was so much to be done in bringing the ground into cultivation, extending the clearings, making journies to Peterborough &c. Percy soon became quite an adept in the use of the hatchet, and I begun to hope that even when the first zest, with which he entered upon this life, so new to him, had subsided, it would still have charms enough, to keep him from sending longing looks back to the civilization he had quitted. Amy and myself,

too, were not idle in our own ways. At home we had not been taught accomplishments only, many more useful and practical parts of education had been added, and now these acquirements came into play. I was, besides, very eager to learn all that Mrs. Farquharson could teach me, and by degrees attained the arts of soap, maple sugar, and candle making, with many other duties that fall more especially to the share of the female emigrant; Amy had occupation enough with the children. In the evenings, after the toil of the day was over, the labourers gone to their shanties, the oxen in their sheds, and Percy returned to the house, we used to assemble in our one sitting room, through the window and open door of which, might be seen a view of the blue lake and dense forest beyond; and when the meal was ended and the children asleep in their rough cots, we would then resume our old European habits of reading, chess or backgammon, music and needle-work, the latter certainly more useful than ornamental of its kind.

But with me it was not all work; I had many pleasures; the love of flowers, which I had so cultivated at home, was not likely to languish for want of nourishment in this rich country. The beautiful parasites, the rare grasses and lovely

aquatic plants, furnished for me a continual source of delight; and when no household work required my special attention, or occasionally when the day's work was finished, and ere the sun had set, I used to make short excursions, sometimes alone, sometimes with my twin nephews, now becoming of a companionable age, and return from the borders of the lake, or the neighbouring forest, laden with choice specimens, some to plant in the garden, which Percy had had fenced round for me near the log hut, others to be added to my Herbarium, which already began to assume a portentous size.

The variety of birds and insects, too, afforded me great delight; not in their collection, for I am not naturalist enough to take pleasure in any thing that has been deprived of liberty, or wantonly of life, but in observing the gay colors, admiring the brilliant plumage of some of the birds, and listening to their singular and often plaintive notes. Frequently have I stood, with as much delight as my little companions, watching the graceful movement of the elegant squirrels as they leapt nimbly from bough to bough, and especially the flying squirrel with its soft, grey chinchilla like fur. The brilliant, changeful, tiny humming-birds used to bring to my mind our own little

humming-bird of the Grange, and the sight of one, recalling as it did the associations connected with its name, would always bring tears into my eyes.

Our neighbours, the Farquharsons, were a great acquisition, both as regarded society and their readiness to help with head or hand, whichever was most wanted, so we used frequently to exchange visits most agreeably. There were noxious creatures in our paradise, no doubt; at rare intervals the appearance of a snake would cause us alarm, and the mosquitoes were a continual drawback to our peace, but in looking back to that first summer, those disagreeables and discomforts, like various other annoyances are lost in the retrospect, and the many pleasures stand out clearly from all that is gloomy, and alone catch the eye of memory.

Letters, too, came from time to time, bringing us news of our friends at home; yes, home, for though we might never see it more, all our affections were linked with the old country, and they are the penates after all, which constitute the real home. Aunt Martha wrote often, and though she was now far away from Arden Rise, living with her step-daughter, yet she always contrived to pick up news of a place, in which she knew so much of our interest was centred. Phœbe who,

since our departure, occupied a cottage in the village, was her purveyor, and we were kept well acquainted with all that went on in that neighbourhood.

The Grange was still deserted; Mr. Annesley remained abroad, but was expected home in the autumn. The Cramptons were at Calvers, and the country rang with accounts of the gaieties there. Clarence Aubrey had been staying at the Knoll, he was then at Alverstoke Park, having spent a week or so at Calvers on his way. Mrs. Mainwaring was trying vigorously to get up a flirtation with the new Rector of Arden Rise, who was quite an old man, ndefatigable in his parish, and apparently very insensible to the display of silk flounces and Parisian bonnets, which Sunday after Sunday graced Mrs. Mainwaring's person, and quite distracted the attention of the quiet villagers, some of the younger members of whom semed desirous of imitating, in an awkward way, the example she weekly placed before them. She was very anxious to prove that Mr. Haroldson was a descendant of one of the early Kings of England; she *thought* there was one of the name of Harold, though not quite clear on the subject, or whether he was a Dane, or a Saxon; but whenever she tried to get information from the Rector himself,

he only turned the matter into a joke, and referred her to Rapin. At all events she could talk of little else at present; and as to his sermons, she declared they were really worth listening to, very different from those of the late Rector, poor man! In short, at present, nobody, Mrs Mainwaring thought, was to be compared with Mr. Haroldson, and if mention was made of Mr. Annesley,

"Mr. Annesley, indeed!" was always the scornful reply, "what is his family compared to Mr. Haroldson's? for all the airs he gives himself; breaking the heart too, of that silly little Mabel Willoughby, poor child!"

"I always thought, my dear," Aunt Martha went on, "that he had been particularly kind to you, so I don't know what Mrs. Mainwaring means by breaking your heart." It was from Mrs. Aubrey, I believe, that my aunt got all this gossip.

Another letter a month later, contained a startling piece of intelligence. The Forsters were all to pieces, and Brackenhurst was to be sold! Some unlucky railway speculations had failed, and Mr. Forster was ruined. Mrs. Mainwaring said it served him right for presuming to buy such a place as Brackenhurst, when he would have been puzzled to prove that he ever had a

grandfather, (all her thoughts now ran upon the subject of genealogies); to be sure Mrs. Forster, his mother, was said to be highly connected, but it might be high in another sense, higher than he would care to have enquired into. She was very glad that Bella Forster was brought down, such airs as she gave herself! after Mrs. Mainwaring had, with some difficulty, got the Marchioness of Tantivy to take notice of her, and give her an invitation to Nolands, she had absolutely had the effrontery to turn her back upon Mrs. Mainwaring, one day that she called at Brackenhurst, and had quite cut her out at Nolands, where she used to be so intimate.

Edith wrote, too, a brilliant, fluttering letter like herself. She had been so happy, so gay; Dame Margaret was as kind as ever, and she was making the most of the summer; but Gardie, that is Mr. Annesley, would be at home towards the end of October, and all this gaiety, she feared, would be put an end to. She had had such a scolding from him, for not having written at once to tell him of all that had happened at Arden Rise; she never had received such an angry letter from him before, accusing her of want of feeling, and selfishness, and all manner of horrid things, as if he did not know how warmly she felt for

all her friends; nobody else in the whole world had ever accused her of selfishness. "Then," she went on, justifying herself, "sometimes I did not know where to write to him, and you know, Mabel, that you did not tell me what had occurred to the Claytouns, for a long time. He was very angry and seemed quite hurt, because he only heard of your poor papa's death through his man of business; the letter did not reach him for more than two months after, because he was wandering about in some senseless way, and had fallen ill; and when at last he did get it, he was too ill to move; but in spite of everything, he insisted upon setting out to come home, and then he was laid up again, worse than before, so as soon as he could hold a pen, he wrote home to make every inquiry about you all, Mabel; but you were in Canada long before that; and then he gave the living to old Mr. Haroldson."

Ah, Edith, I wish you had not told me all that! I was trying so hard to believe that I had never cared for him, and to think him cold and indifferent to us all, and insincere in all his professions to my father—and now— Well I don't know that I had succeeded very well, and at all events, it was pleasant to find that human nature

was not always so bad as some would have us think.

I wonder what his illness was, and whether he is well again now?

CHAPTER XV.

" Kind messages that pass from land to land,
Kind letters that betray the heart's deep sympathy,
In which we feel the pressure of a hand—
One touch of fire—and all the rest is mystery."

LONGFELLOW.

THE summer was passing over, and Percy was beginning to talk of building something more picturesque and substantial, than our present inconvenient log hut, before the winter set in.

There had been many consultations on the subject of the site, and one was at last selected, not far from the present one, equally eligible, and commanding a still more beautiful view. My garden was beginning to look quite English and home-like; Percy had had it fenced round for me with split rails, so as to keep out some of the many depredators gardeners have to contend against in these wilds, and as the spot on which the new house was to rise was close to the log

hut, I fondly thought it might still remain, ignorant as I was of the process of building block-houses, and the little regard paid to the ornamental, by labourers in this or any part of the world.

Percy continued to work hard as ever, when he was at home; it astonished both Amy and myself to see the readiness with which he entered into the hard drudgery of the settler's life; how deft he was in the management of the plough, and how entirely he seemed to have exchanged the refinements of his former life, for the rough, laborious occupation of the present. All day long he might be seen working, in his coarse logging-shirt, a Canadian version of the English smock frock, and large flap hat, as energetically as any of the servants, driving the oxen, sowing, planting, chopping down trees, or splitting fence rails, according to the season; beguiling labour with song, and bearing with cheerfulness the many accidents and drawbacks, the young settler has necessarily to encounter. It seemed to be the life of all others the most calculated for him, and then with his natural versatility, when we assembled in the evening, he would resume all his English refinement, join in our amusements, or with Mr. Farquharson discourse on crops and prices, and the respective advantages or disadvantages of different

modes of cultivation, as if he had been accustomed to the life of a Backwoods-man from childhood. It would have been impossible I think to live with Percy and not admire and like him, however one might lament the weakness of his character; always latent, and sometimes but too visible.

By degrees, however, a change came over him. On the other side of the lake were some fresh settlers, whose habits were more fitted to their former than their present mode of life. Young men, who had come out with little knowledge of what they were undertaking, and imagined that sport and amusement, not labour, was to be their portion. A similarity of tastes soon caused an intimacy between Percy and themselves, and though, when at home, his energy was not relaxed, his absences became more frequent. Many excuses were found for journies to Peterborough, which occupied more time than mere business would have demanded. Parties were made for duck shooting, fishing by torchlight, hunting the forest for game, or sleighing, as the season suggested.

Amy remonstrated, but without effect, nor did Mr. Farquharson's cautions receive more attention; so we were obliged to content ourselves with trying to make his home more attractive, and

attending ourselves, with increased assiduity, to the work which devolved more especially on us. Of these, besides the household employments and others that I have spoken of, we had also a respectable poultry yard and a small dairy. The former was an amusement to the children, who were sturdy, independant little fellows, quite fitted for the rough life they led, which doubtless contributed much to their health and vigour. They were our constant companions, or more properly speaking, mine—for Amy was now devoted to the care of her little girl, and the necessary occupation of useful needlework.

Thus the summer went on, leaving little leisure for dwelling on memory; active and earnest work from sunrise to sunset, afforded few opportunities for the indulgence of vague and unprofitable musings; Beechley Grange even, with all its fond associations, might seem to be forgotten, till letters from England awoke all the yearnings and treasured recollections which had but slept; and as giants under the influence of a spell, when touched by the enchanter's wand, start up with renewed vigour to resume the life that has but been suspended, so did all those feelings, which from childhood had twined themselves round my heart, till they had become, as it were, a part of

my being, spring up, at the sight of a home letter, from the slumber which had held them, and resume all their terrible power over me.

Our friends did not forget us, and we were kept pretty well acquainted with the progress of events at home. October came, Mr. Annesley had returned to England, and Edith was making preparations for her wedding, which was to take place in November.

The Cramptons had promised to remain till after that event. Mr. Annesley had spent a short time at Calvers, but Edith said he looked wan and thin, and had by no means recovered from the effects of his illness, which must have been more severe than he had allowed her to suppose. He was now at Beechley Grange, she hardly knew what feelings predominated in her anticipation of his return. She thanked me for my promise to send her the humming-bird's nest which had been brought me, but feared it would not be an appropriate gift; she felt more like a poor little sparrow, all her bright changeful sheen absorbed into the dull brown of respectable every day life. Dame Margaret laughed at her sadness, and said she was only moulting, all birds flagged under the operation, she would come out in brighter colours than ever, when she had assumed her new

name and position. Mr. Annesley said nothing of the kind, he seemed to like her better than befo re ; he never laughed himself now, though he often sighed, and sometimes he was so lost in deep thought, that the sound of her voice, or the touch of her hand on his shoulder, would make him start as if an arrow had pierced him.

Europe was then beginning to shake with the rumours of war. The nations were concentrating their forces in the Crimea, " at least this is what I hear people about me say," Edith went on, " it is not an affair that I pretend to know much about, or to feel great interest in. Gardie is always talking and thinking of it, I really was glad when he went to the Grange, for I used to have such trouble to hide my yawns, when he and Colonel Crampton were discussing that subject. Dame Margaret too, enters into it as heartily as her brother ; and while I was dying to ask him, what colours he would think most becoming for my travelling dress on our wedding tour, or whether I should be married in a white moiré with Brussels lace flounces, or in a dress of lace altogether; and where we were to go to, and a hundred other things more in my way, they were always talking about the interests of Europe, and the alliance of England and France—as if the alliance of Mr. Annesley and

myself were not far more to the purpose! I really believe, but for me, he would be off to the Crimea as a volunteer, or some such nonsense; sometimes he even talks of such a thing, and then he looks at me, and heaves such a deep sigh; and a minute after, perhaps, he comes up with some gentle caress, and asks what his little humming-bird would say to it? and the other day he gave me such a surprised, pleased smile, because I answered him from one of those old ballads, that, you know, he sets such store by,

"'But it is often sene
When men wyll breke promyse, they speke
The wordés on the splene.
Ye shape some wyle me to begyle,
And stele from me, I wene;
But, in my mynde, of all mankynde
I love but you alone.'

"'What, Edith quoting old ballads?' he said, and looked so pleased, 'we shall have her a convert to the Grange before long, I really believe, Margaret.'

"'No you won't, you tiresome old Gardie,' I answered, 'only you must not be thinking so much of that stupid war. I want you to give yourself up to me entirely now. You must admire me in every thing I put on, do just what I like, go wherever I ask you, and—'

"'Spoil my little humming-bird entirely,' he said, interrupting me. 'Are these really the duties of a bridegroom, Edith? I am afraid I am very ignorant, but I must try and improve. Poor child!' he went on, 'I fear, though, that I must be a rebel at once, for I have to go to the Grange to-morrow. Shall I tell Mrs. Wilson to have the bower-rooms in order for you, Edith?'

'No,' I said, 'it would be time enough to cage me when he had caught me; and then he stroked my hair and lifted up my face, which was, I believe, pouting a little, between his two hands, and looked into it so wistfully, and with such a sad smile, I wondered what was coming; but all at once he turned away and left the room without a word, and soon after I heard him talking to some men in the grounds, just as if he had wholly forgotten my existence. So now you must tell me what you are doing in the backwoods. I read Gardie that part of your letter in which you described your busy life, and the excursions you and your companions had made to visit the Indian family; he listened with such interest, and then he said, Mabel was a noble-hearted girl, she would give dignity to the meanest station, or grace the highest, and by and bye he made some excuse to ask me, if I would mind letting him have that

part of the letter, saying something about wanting to read it to old Griffith and his wife, who would be sure to ask innumerable questions about you. I should feel inclined to be jealous, Mabel, only I think he loves his little humming-bird with all her faults, though I dare say he respects you more; but love suits me better than respect."

I was not to expect another letter from her for a long time, she said; not till she was married, and had returned to Calvers, and had been living there long enough to be able to tell me how she liked her new life. I was quite content. Whatever there might be that was gratifying to me in her letters, the bitter flavoured all too strongly.

They made me unsettled too, and discontented for days, and Amy used to complain of my selfishness. I came out to be a help to her, she would say on such occasions, and was always throwing such longing looks homeward, that I was more an incumbrance.

I dare say she was right, and I was myself hardly aware how much my spirits, and even my temper suffered after reading one of these letters. Yet I tried to submit without murmuring.

Philip wrote word that he was looking forward to next spring, when he hoped to be admitted into Holy Orders, and begin his work. My father's

death, and our departure, had made him lose a term or two, otherwise he might have been ordained at Christmas.

Soon after Christmas, Aunt Martha wrote, but it was a short letter, and the only piece of news it contained was the death of Lord Ottersee, which at last had been rather sudden. Clarence was the Earl now, and she supposed as soon as his marriage with Lady Ruth could take place, it would, since he had expressed himself much grieved, that it had been delayed too long to enable his uncle's wishes to be fully gratified.

Both Mrs. Aubrey and himself were at Alverstoke; he had left the army, which had been a great mortification to him, just at this moment, when all men were buckling on their armour; altogether he seemed much out of spirits. Poor Ruth was sadly cast down, she heard, which of course was natural, on the loss of a parent whom she loved so tenderly, and who had doated upon her. "Edith is in Ireland, I believe, and very happy no doubt," she added, in a postscript.

No doubt she was!—but poor Ruth, what would I not have given to be by her side just then! there had always been so much congeniality between us, that I thought I might have been able to comfort and cheer her perhaps, at least

I could have wept with her "tear for tear," though not exactly for the same cause.

Misfortunes, however, like our other friends, had not forgotten us, in spite of our escape to the New World. There was one then hanging over us, which, when it did fall, drew all my sympathy nearer home.

January, February and March went over, and with the exception of a few lines from Ruth, our home correspondents were almost silent. Philip wrote hurried letters, such as young men generally indite, without one atom of news in them, about those in whom I was so interested: speaking only of his studies, his examinations, his prospects of a curacy. Dear Philip, it was not that I was careless about all those things, but I wanted more; and unfortunately poor Aunt Martha was laid up all the winter with such a severe attack of rheumatic fever, that writing was an impossibility, and we only received bulletins of her progress at stated intervals from Miss Stanley, who confined herself strictly to the main subject of her letters. Edith was totally silent, she was too happy to think of the exiles, or, perhaps, she did not care to write to me now that she was Mrs. Annesley. So time went on with a heavy, slouching gait, notwithstanding continual occupation and a good deal of

enjoyment; for in such a dry, exhilarating climate, where the cold, intense as it is, braces the nerves and makes exercise a positive pleasure, the spirits rise in spite of oneself, and one knows nothing of the depressing, uncomfortable, wet-blanket-like sensation that cold produces in England.

We had enjoyed several delightful sleigh excursions, in which even Amy, delicate as she was now, was able to take part; Percy and his new friends, too, had had a good deal of skating, which I much liked looking on at, and they sometimes drove us about the lake in a hand sleigh. There were many pleasant meetings of various kinds, and though there might now and then be an aching heart beneath a merry countenance, besides the various anxieties inseparable from a settler's life, our winter might be called a happy one.

Towards the middle of March a change took place; the weather suddenly broke up, and a rapid thaw came on; Percy had gone to spend a few days with his new friends, he had driven across the lake in his sleigh, and was to return the same way. At our end of the lake the thaw had been going on much more rapidly than the other end, and, on the afternoon that we expected his return, the ice was by no means in a safe state for driving over. Still we were not apprehensive, supposing that he would only

change the mode of his return in consequence; but when afternoon changed to evening, and that again shaded into night, and the dark hours passed away, and dawn once more lighted up the skies, and still no sign of Percy—Amy's fears, which at first had only been anxieties, were becoming unendurable. It was so unlike Percy to be materially beyond the hour he had told her to expect his return, for, with all his faults he was ever thoughtful and careful for Amy, that I could not help entertaining great apprehensions myself, though I endeavoured to reassure her, and conceal my own uneasiness. Before daybreak, I had secretly dispatched a messenger on the pony, to go round the edge of the lake to the house where he had been staying, in order to ascertain if he had set out on his return home. I could not expect him back till evening, and during that day of suspense and agony, while poor Amy's agitation increased every hour, the words of hope and comfort almost died upon my own lips as with me, apprehension gradually sunk into despair. Poor Amy could do nothing but pace up and down in front of the house, looking out across the lake, or vainly striving to pierce the depths of the forest; eye and ear strained to their utmost. Mrs. Farquharson, hearing of our anxiety, had consider-

ately come over to us by sunrise, and taken away the three children to her own house; her kind husband did his best to give hope which I thought he was himself far from feeling; and to aid in the search, by sending out messengers and even going himself for some distance, though, knowing he could be of more use at home, he never left us for long.

It was the evening of the day after that on which Percy should have come home, when my messenger returned—alas! it was but to crush the small semblance of hope we had cherished. Percy had started to cross the lake at the time he had fixed; there was then every prospect of the ice continuing firm, long enough to enable him to reach home;—now, no doubt remained that he had sunk, and that Amy was a widow!

CHAPTER XVI.

"Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee. Do thou
With courtesy receive him; rise and bow,
And ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave.
Then lay before him all thou hast. Allow
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
The soul's marmoreal calmness. Grief should be
Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate;
Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free;
Strong to consume small trouble, to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end."

AUBREY DE VERE.

A MONTH had passed after the terrible event mentioned in the last chapter. As soon as doubt had become certainty, our kind friends had insisted on Amy and myself returning to their house. The former, indeed, had no power of volition; the first words spoken by the messenger, whom we

had sent to the other side of the lake, had deprived her of consciousness. Without this additional trial, what could I have done, with only the girl who assisted us in the household work, and Amy so helpless? gratefully therefore, I accepted their hospitality, and before many hours Amy was the mother of a still-born child, and in a state which gave little or no hope of her recovery. Weeks passed, indeed, before she regained any degree of consciousness, and even after that returned, she could hardly be said to be alive; so feeble, so utterly broken in heart and constitution did she seem. The end of April came, and still she lay unable to move, sometimes sleeping, sometimes awake, but without energy, or indeed power, to speak or stir. It was then that the idea of writing these few incidents of my life, occurred to me; when having lulled my poor charge into a quiet sleep by the monotonous tone of my voice, I sat gazing on the gorgeous sunset, that was decking the watery grave of our lost Percy, with such a glory; and, involuntarily my thoughts sprung back to the early days of my life, busying themselves with my childhood's home, and those who had once shed such a light of love and happiness around it.

Of course Mr. Claytoun had been written to at

once; my kind host and friend undertook this painful business, as well as the temporary superintendance of the farm, till another purchaser could be found. Friends, indeed, both himself and his wife were to us; from the first moment of our arrival in the country, utter strangers personally to both, we had experienced nothing but the most thoughtful and helpful friendship; and now in this last crushing trouble, they had opened house and heart to us, and treated us as if we had been dear and valued relatives. It is seldom such kindness is met with, and surely it is never to be forgotten.

It was now May, and we were anxiously looking for news from England. An answer might by this time be expected daily. Amy was mending slightly, and at times I was able to leave her, when, as now, she had sunk into a sleep; then sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by the children, I used to stroll out and refresh my exhausted powers, and enjoy the soft air which played so balmily around me.

One afternoon about a week later, having left Amy in a calm slumber, I wandered down to the borders of the lake, nearly a mile from the house, and seating myself on the stump of a tree, I drew Edith's last letter from my pocket and began to read it again for the thousandth

time. It was foolish to dwell upon it now; I had said that to myself over and over again, and yet I opened it once more, to read her conversation about me with Mr. Annesley. More than three months had passed and Edith was silent still; it was not that which distressed me, but I knew this could not have been if Mr. Annesley had felt only common interest about me. Why then should I waste thought, still more regret, upon one who was plainly so indifferent, in whose character I had been so fearfully deceived, whose professions of friendship had been forgotten in little more than a year? Why indeed?—But when was reason ever admitted as judge in a matter of feeling? I acknowledged my folly, but still I persevered in it, and as I sate, my face covered with my hands and my elbows resting on my knees, large, heavy drops gathered slowly and fell from time to time through my fingers, on to the paper beneath.

I was utterly absorbed, and unconscious of everything around me. Bent upon driving out all remembrance of the past from my mind, even while going over deliberately every incident of that past; meditating upon the vanity of words so worthless and insincere—while recalling every syllable almost that had sunk into, and formed, as it were, its own individual tomb in my heart. Tomb? yes!

for what was my heart now but a resting place for the dead? a cross or a cypress marked every recollection of my life. It was but as a possession of a burial place that I now claimed any connection with the past, and if flowers were to bloom for me hereafter, they could be only such as we plant over the graves of those loved ones who are no more.

Immersed in these gloomy imaginings I sate motionless. For the time, sorrow had crushed down the natural buoyancy even of a spirit so elastic generally, as mine, and now she planted a firm foot on the neck of her fallen enemy, usually so difficult to conquer, and held it down, while she triumphantly waved her gloomy banner in the air.

Nature was glowing in all the fresh beauty of her sudden spring; leaping into maturity at a bound, as she does in this climate, like Cadmus' dragon's teeth springing up at once into armed men. Butterflies of the most gorgeous hues, dragon-flies, glittering ephemeræ of every variety, glanced and scintillated in the glowing air. The blue lake gleamed below and sent forth a moaning sound, as if wailing for him who had found a grave beneath its clear waters, while it reflected in its translucent bosom the bright sky, and the

bordering forest, which threw its inky shadows along the sides. Birds of brilliant plumage fluttered among the trees, and flowers emulating their brightness carpetted the earth, while a wilderness of flowering shrubs was around me—all this loveliness existed, but to all I was then insensible; my bodily eyes were closed, my mental vision saw but two spots in the far off Old World, gloomy, compared with the scene around me, but possessing for me a charm, with which not even nature's gayest tints could invest any other; one was the dear old Rectory at Arden Rise, the other, that dimly lighted library at the Grange.

All at once a firm, quick footstep approached, and almost as I became aware of the sound, a hand lightly touched my shoulder.

"Mabel!" was uttered in accents but too well known, though the name was pronounced less firmly than usual. I neither screamed, nor lost my senses, though I doubted if I were in possession of them, but turning half round as I sate, I gazed up speechlessly at the face which beamed down upon me, a quiet smile breaking through the troubled sadness which overcast it, like an April gleam of sunshine forcing its way through the clouds.

Were my senses indeed deceiving me? had my

imagination really conjured up a phantom, or was that Mr. Annesley in flesh and blood who stood beside me. At last finding voice, I said in an under tone, "You?—you here? can it be possible? you Mr. Annesley?"

"None else, Mabel," he answered, with a look in which a shade of amusement at my extreme surprise, struggled with the expression of deep sympathy which repressed it. "Why should it so astonish you to see me? Is it because I was unable to come before, when sorrow first overtook you, that I should be absent always?"

"And Edith?" I asked, still uncertain whether I was really talking with a material being, and throwing an uneasy, searching glance beyond him.

"Edith is well, and I hope happy," he rejoined.

"And not with you?" I demanded again, hardly raising my voice above a whisper.

"Not with me, Mabel," he replied, the smile this time fairly overcoming the sadness. "You must have become intimate enough with the habits of humming-birds, ere this, to know that long flights, especially over the water, are not in their way. No, grieved as she is for you, she could not have come, even if I would have brought

her. But I am not alone, Mr. Claytoun came over at the same time, and is now learning all your sad history from Mr. and Mrs. Farquharson; they directed me to where you would be most likely found, and so I came to hear it from yourself."

"You have not seen Amy?" I said, as he threw himself on the grass at my feet.

"Hardly," he replied, "do you suppose I would linger for such a purpose when Undine was near?"

"I am glad Mr. Claytoun is come," I went on, rather pursuing my own thoughts than speaking to my companion, "it will comfort Amy; poor Amy! sorrow has fallen so heavily upon her."

"And is she the only sufferer, Mabel?" he asked, "has there been no gentle sister ready to throw herself as a shield between Amy and grief? abandoning her home and friends—sharing her little fortune—undergoing voluntarily the hardships and privations incidental to a settler's life, that she might be an aid and a comfort to a sister, who would have hardly done the same had their situations been reversed?"

The attitude he had assumed, the tone in which he spoke, the situation—all brought to my mind the day of the archery in Brackenhurst Park, and threw an air of mockery over his present words and manner, which made them unspeakably bitter and irritating

to me; changed as our mutual positions were now, all this was mere compassion and patronage which, from him, I felt to be insufferable; it must have been expressed in the coldness of my tone as I observed,

"I have made no sacrifices; where was my home but with Amy?—Friends?" I went on with a slight laugh, "they were those of the poor hare—and as to hardships—when the mind is ill at ease the body feels no privations. Amy is all I have now but Philip, and to him I should only have been an incumbrance."

"Your friends are grateful to you for the esteem in which you hold them, Mabel," he replied catching the coldness of my tone. "For myself, it is hardly worth while perhaps now, to enter into the causes which kept me from you on a former occasion; I am probably one of the faithless friends to whom you allude, if indeed I am considered as a friend at all; but Lady Ruth Aubrey, at least, and Edith were friends, though not perhaps very powerful ones."

"I was ungrateful," I said, as the allusion to his own illness smote me, "forgive me, Mr. Annesley, I have heard from Edith of your illness, of your efforts to reach home, of your inability to do so; and now you are come out here to our help,

and have left your pleasant home and Edith, to seek the exiles in their distress; forgive me, I have been very ungrateful!" And in spite of my utmost efforts, I could not help my voice faltering as I spoke the last words.

"My pleasant home, as you sarcastically call it, did not give me many heart aches in the leaving," he replied, in a grave, constrained tone, as he tore up and flung away large tufts of the grass and flowers on which he was lying. "For Edith, I acknowledge the proof of interest was greater; I was unwilling to leave her, and must hasten back to her again; but first I would fain be of some service here, if you will let me. Mr. Claytoun is with you, it is true, but it was not till after my own arrangements were made that I knew he was coming."

"Or you would not have come at all, probably," I added, all my better feelings drowned in the wave of jealousy that rushed over my heart. "I am sure Amy will be sensible of the sacrifice you have made for her, but with Percy's father to assist, she cannot be so heedless as to wish to detain you from the home, where of course you must be much wanted." I rose as I spoke thus, bitterly enough and ungratefully, I felt, but my heart was very sore at the thought of being an object of

compassion, and yet it smote me all the time that, as if by the suggestions of some demon, I was so wantonly vexing and wounding this noble heart. Had he not truly made a great and inestimable sacrifice, in leaving his four-months bride to cross the ocean, in the hope of helping Amy and myself? and did he not deserve a kinder welcome? my own heart pleaded for him, but the remembrance of our last interview at the Grange, leagued with temper and jealousy, and other fiends, had taken possession of me. I would not see his sacrifices, I would not acknowledge the gratitude that struggled to be felt. No, not even when casting one furtive glance backwards as I walked away, I saw him still in the same position, looking after me with a countenance full of a sort of pained surprise.

For the moment, pride had gained the victory over every good feeling, and folly exulted in what wisdom would have blushed, and wept for.

I walked on slowly, expecting—I think hoping—that he would follow; but finding that he did not overtake me, I turned to look what had become of him, and saw him wandering slowly along the borders of the lake, in the direction of our own farm. Had he come towards me, my absurd

pride must have fallen, I should have owned my error I think, and asked his forgiveness as I used to do, when as a little child, he would chide me with his grave gentle voice for my faults, and with tears I would ask his pardon, and he would stroke my hair and smile down upon me, and call me his docile little Mabel.

The moment had passed now, and the opportunity was lost, not to be regained. Oh, why is it that we so often take delight in trifling with and teasing those who are dearest to us? Why will the full heart, overflowing with affection, sometimes only vent itself in reproaches and unkind words, while it is all the time thirsting to throw itself on the bosom it is wounding? why is human nature so perverse? How must our guardian angel at the moment of our fancied, puny triumph, hide his grieved face behind his pure wings, and weep over the weak folly of his charge!

When I got back to the house, I heard Mr. Claytoun's voice in conversation with the Farquharsons, but not feeling myself equal to encountering them then, I passed on to Amy's room, whom I found roused beyond my hopes by the interview with her father-in-law. My first act, however, was to throw myself into a chair and burst into tears; it was foolish and inconsiderate,

but what else could I boast myself to be? and, perhaps, the very extremity of the case, coming as it did upon the recent excitement, rather stimulated Amy than otherwise.

I believe she had always had some vague idea of my state of feeling towards Mr. Annesley, though it had only been by a cut or an inuendo that she had evinced any knowledge of it. Since the announcement of Edith's engagement and marriage, she had abstained from any allusion to the subject. Perhaps she fancied, from my general behaviour, that she had been mistaken; perhaps it was delicacy towards me which caused her to refrain from remarks; in either case she would naturally feel that a meeting with him now, could not be without emotion and pain, and acting upon this feeling she exerted herself to comfort me, pretending to see in my agitation only the effect of an unexpected rencontre with an old friend, and speaking kindly and sympathetically.

I soon recovered myself, and, laying my head on her pillow, we talked for the first time since Percy's death, long and quietly of the past, and looked into the future.

It was undoubtedly a kind, considerate step which Mr. Claytoun had taken, and poor Amy seemed to cling so fondly to him now, as the

father of Percy, and to be so deeply impressed with the affection that had prompted his putting business aside, which to a man of his habits was a sacrifice not to be lightly estimated, and coming out to console and fetch her home, that she was anxious to make any exertion to reward him, and prevent needless delay.

As for Mr. Annesley, he declared at once that it was equally impossible and unnecessary for him to wait till Amy was able to begin the journey, which she hoped to do in about ten days or a fortnight; Mr. Claytoun being with us, he could be of little use he said, he would therefore devote the few days of his stay to the sale of the farm, which would oblige him to remain at Peterborough. So he left us the next morning, we parted coldly and proudly as on the preceding day; a letter from him to Mr. Claytoun announcing the satisfactory sale of the settlement and his own departure for England, was all the farther communication between us.

Meanwhile, Amy afforded no impediment to our own departure, the very idea of seeing England again, seemed to have revived her, and in a fortnight from the time of Mr. Claytoun's arrival, we took a grateful leave of our kind friends, and set out on our homeward journey. Except for its

being homeward, however, there was little to make it pleasant; Mr. Claytoun, kind as he intended to be, was not one to win confidence or inspire much interest, and as I passed most of my time, both before and during the journey and voyage, in attending upon Amy and the children, there were not many opportunities of intercourse.

CHAPTER XVII.

" Wie diese treue, liebe Seele
Von ihrem Glauben voll,
Der ganz allein
Ihr seligmachend ist, sich heilig quäle,
Dasz sie den liebsten Mann verloren halten soll."

GOETHE.

" PHILIP, Curate of Arden Rise!" I exclaimed, as entering Amy's room at Everleigh Court, a few mornings after our return home, I heard one of the Miss Claytouns imparting to her the news.

" Yes," she replied, " did you not know it? Well, of course you know that he was ordained in the spring, and as Mr. Haroldson is quite an old man, not equal to the full duty of even that small parish, Mr. Annesley proposed that he should offer your brother the curacy for a title, which he was glad enough to do, and Mr. Willoughby lives at the Rectory with him."

"Then I think he might have come over to see us, before this," Amy remarked.

"You must remember that you took us rather by surprise in coming so soon," Miss Claytoun answered, "we had not calculated on seeing you, for at least, a week or ten days; I know he had to go to Oxford last week, and should not be surprised if he went on to Liverpool, with the idea of meeting you. I heard him discussing such a plan with Mr. Haroldson and Mr. Annesley, before he went."

"Mr. Annesley?" Amy repeated. "Is he in the neighbourhood now? surely he might have come to see his old friends."

"He lives almost entirely at the Grange, now," was the answer, "but very possibly he may be at Calvers at present; you know, of course, there are strange and weighty matters in anticipation there."

"Ah, so I suppose," Amy said with indifference.

"But how is it that Mr. Annesley spends so much of his time at the Grange?" I asked, finding Amy not inclined to continue the subject. "I thought Edith could not endure the place," I continued, as I stood at the window with my back towards the others.

"Perhaps Edith has not much to do with the

matter," Miss Claytoun said laughing, "little tyrant as she is, I think she would hardly have power to prevent Mr. Annesley coming to the Grange as often as he liked."

"And the Aubreys?" Amy asked, as if on purpose to turn the conversation. "Where is Lady Ruth now, does she recover her spirits?"

"Poor thing!" was the answer. "She looks paler and sadder than ever. And by the bye, Mabel, I had a note from her a few days ago, asking me to give her the earliest notice of your arrival, which I have quite forgotten to do."

"Oh, Helen!" I exclaimed, reproachfully, as I turned round.

"Nay, you must forgive me, Mabel," she said, deprecatingly. "The influx of Amy, and yourself, and three children into our quiet family, was enough to put other matters out of my head, you will allow, but I'll tell you how the omission shall be rectified; I will drive you to the Knoll after breakfast to-morrow, and that will surely make amends to both Lady Ruth and yourself, for my forgetfulness I hope."

And so next morning I found myself sitting by Helen Claytoun's side, as she guided her spirited, swift ponies along that road, that years ago I had travelled, in the dusk of a chilly November evening

with Mr. Annesley beside me, and a glow and a light in my heart which bade defiance to all the cold and gloom of the outer world. It was the day we had come together from Alverstoke Park, when I had felt for the first time that he considered me no longer as the child, but acknowledged me as a helpful and companionable woman. Now, the sun shone brightly, the hedges were musical with the song of birds, the banks were gay with spring flowers, nature wore her most alluring and animated garb, and yet a chill and a gloom in my own heart made the external brilliancy seem but as a mockery. I was passing, at almost every step, some object connected with the memory of a happy childhood; everything spoke to me of dearly loved friends, and recalled cherished associations, yet a weight lay on my soul —the beloved ones were either dead, or worse still, changed; the place that I had myself made vacant was filled by other objects, and knew me no more; even to Ruth, my unannounced visit might be unwelcome. Noble hearted Ruth! it was an ungenerous suspicion, discarded at the very moment it intruded.

Helen must have found me but a dull companion, for I was too much occupied with my own thoughts to be able to converse; but she was in-

dulgent, and did not interrupt my meditations, so I leaned back in the carriage and abandoned myself to their power.

We drove through the village of Arden Rise; how I longed to make myself known to the people who came to their doors, or stood still on the road, to look wonderingly after the pretty equipage; every face was familiar to me, and the stare of admiration would, I knew, have lighted up into the smile of delight, had they recognized the lady by Miss Claytoun's side, in such deep mourning, whose face was concealed by the thick crape veil.

We came to the Rectory, and I looked wistfully at the familiar place, with the church spire rising beyond it; Helen half pulled up. "Shall we drive in?" she asked, "Mr. Haroldson may be able to tell us when your brother will return."

"Not now, thank you," I said, and we passed on by the two or three cottages, and then the large wrought iron gates of the Grange came in view, they stood open, and there was an air of habitation about the place; one might see that the April sunshine of the master's presence had overpowered the November gloom, that hung about it when he was absent. My heart beat quickly, but not with hope, only with the recollection of what had been. Helen drew in her reins

slightly, looking down the avenue as she drove past.

"Mr. Annesley is still here I imagine, from the aspect of things," she said, "it would be good fun to give him a call—how astonished he would be to see you!" and I thought she was going to turn the ponies' heads that way.

"Oh, no, no, no!" I exclaimed starting up, and so far forgetting the proprieties in my alarm, as to lay my hand upon the reins. "You forget that he knows we are in England," I went on more quietly, withdrawing my hand and sinking back again, as she turned a surprised look quickly upon me. "He came out to Canada, and returned home only about ten days before us."

"True, I had forgotten." Helen observed driving on more quickly. "But I remember now papa's writing word of having met him unexpectedly at Liverpool."

Half a mile farther, and we were at the Knoll. I need not have been anxious about my reception, it was only too overpoweringly kind. Helen stayed there a short time, and then proposed to make other visits in the neighbourhood, and call for me again in the afternoon; but both Mrs. Aubrey and Ruth were so urgent that I should remain there a day or two, that it was agreed at last

Helen should return without me, sending over what was requisite for me while I stayed.

There was something wonderfully soothing and composing to me at all times, in Ruth's manner; people thought her cold, to my mind she was only gentle and self-possessed. She was like oil upon troubled waters, calming the fluttered spirits with her soft yet prevailing influence.

We spent much of the day in her own sitting room, for both had enough to hear and to tell, and Mrs. Aubrey considerately did not interrupt us.

"And Clarence?" I asked, after Ruth had told me all about her father's death, and her cousin's kindness then and afterwards, "when is he to be rewarded, Ruth?"

"You must ask that question elsewhere," she replied, "I am no longer the arbitress of his fate."

"Elsewhere? not of you?" I exclaimed in astonishment, "has he then, with all his kindness, been base enough to thwart his uncle's wishes, when he was no longer by, to enforce them?"

"No, Mabel, there is no baseness in the case," she answered with her gentle smile, "it is I, not Clarence, who have thwarted the wishes of my father, in one way; but, knowing that he was ambitious for my happiness rather than my dignity,

I am inclined to think I complied with them in freeing Clarence from his engagement. There was another reason too which influenced me, and of which I was ignorant till my father's death," she went on in a lower tone, and with her eyes fixed on the ground, "I had no right to impose upon Clarence a wife who bore a blot in her escutcheon."

"But it would have been no imposition, dear Ruth, Clarence was not ignorant of the circumstance to which you allude, and surely there was no need to sacrifice yourself, for a fault in which you had no share."

"I cannot boast of having made any sacrifice," Ruth answered smiling, "Clarence never appeared desirous to win my love, nor did I ever bestow more than cousinly affection upon him; as such I love him, but he is not one who I could ever have loved or regarded as a husband."

"And Clarence?" I asked again, "How did he receive your decision?"

"He was not inconsolable," she replied. "But first I took care that he should not be injured by the arrangement, or rather disarrangement. I have given back to the estate, all of which my father, feeling probably that it would be necessary to gild the bait, had robbed it to enrich me, and have

accepted only the sum of money in the Funds which he left me, and which is more than enough to satisfy my most ambitious desires. You will think so, perhaps, when I tell you that with a portion of it I have purchased Brackenhurst."

"Brackenhurst!" I exclaimed, and then recalling what, amidst things of more interest, had escaped my memory, I went on, "ah, I recollect hearing something of the Forsters being obliged to sell it, on account of some speculation that had failed."

"Yes," she said, "Mr. Forster was one of those who, in making haste to be rich had, like vaulting ambition, o'erleapt himself. Brackenhurst was to be sold; I had heard you lament over its alienation from the Annesley family, to whom it originally belonged, and what you said, gave me an interest in it. I was told that Mr. Annesley's purchasing it was out of the question, and I had the vanity to think it might be more agreeable to his feelings to see the property in my hands, than in those of some *nouveau riche* like Mr. Forster, so, as I was advised to purchase some estate by way of an investment, I fixed my heart upon Brackenhurst, and the bargain was made."

"I am glad it is your's, Ruth," I rejoined, "though I should have thought Mr. Annesley would

have strained a point, and could have done so now, to repossess it. But I really am sorry for Clarence, he must feel somewhat encumbered by his solitary state."

"Don't waste compassion on him, dear Mabel," vas Ruth's smiling reply, "it is I who deserve it most; for, humiliating as it is to find oneself unloved, it is still more so to know that another occupied the throne before it was fairly vacated. Clarence's state will soon be shared by a prettier and more suitable Countess than I should have made."

"What and who do you mean, Ruth?" I exclaimed, more and more startled by her concluding words.

"Who but Edith Marsh?" she said, "why, Mabel, you must have been blind indeed not to have known his love for her, long ago. I saw it so far back as the archery party at Brackenhurst. But what makes you look so wild?" she went on, as I sat with my eyes fixed upon her, and my hands pressed upon my temples.

"Edith Marsh?" I repeated, "Edith Annesley you mean Ruth—but Clarence—Countess—what can you be thinking of?"

"Nay, I may ask that question of you, dear Mabel, have you lost your senses? Or what makes you talk about Edith Annesley? Why of

course you must know that that incongruous match was broken off, equally to the relief of both sides."

No, I had never heard it. Since Edith had written to communicate the near approach of her marriage with Mr. Annesley, I had heard no more from her. Her silence I had attributed, partly to her own happiness which made her careless of her friends, partly, if not to indifference on his part, to some feeling which prevented his having any desire to keep up the communication; and under this impression it was, that I had so resented his kindness in seeking us out in Canada; viewed by the light that I had thus thrown upon it, it had seemed an unfeeling parade of interest, a quiet ignoring and putting aside, of the feelings he had so often led me to suppose he entertained towards me, and which with his clearsightedness he must have been aware were returned; a sort of triumph over the poor, silly, little girl who had so readily mistaken compassion for love; and a wish still to test his power, and try if the weak foolish heart would yet vibrate to his touch. Had I asked questions, of course I could have elicited the truth from Mr. Claytoun; but it never occurred to me to doubt the fact, or to make enquiries upon a subject which interested me too painfully, least

of all, of Mr. Claytoun; Amy had other things to engross her thoughts, and as no intimacy existed between Everleigh Court and the Grange, there had been but that one allusion to the family, which was brought out by my surprise, on hearing that Mr. Annesley still resided occasionally at Beechley. But now as Ruth spoke, the scales fell from my eyes; I ran over in my mind all that he had said, and understood at once the double interpretation the words would bear, and his own ignorance of my surmises, which would prevent his having any clue to my conduct. All this passed rapidly through my mind, as I sat with Lady Ruth's eyes rivetted, in wonder, on me.

"Edith not married?" at last I gasped out. "How weak and wicked and ungrateful then have I been!" After a time, my excitement yielded to Ruth's composure, and I was able to ask questions, which she answered at length, by entering into a full explanation of the circumstances.

"But first," she said, "I must explain, that in calling the match incongruous, you must not think I meant disrespect to Mr. Annesley, on the contrary, I think him worthy of something better than Edith Marsh; and you will forgive me for saying, that from the first time of my seeing you together at Brackenhurst, I felt very sure

whom his own heart would lead him to select; and I thought, not only that his choice would be a good one, but that—well, you need not blush and look so indignant, dear—I will only say then, that I thought you had sufficient appreciation of his excellence, and charm of mind and manner, to make you not insensible to the flattery of his preference. In my idea of his feelings towards you, I was confirmed by my observations during the few hours he spent at Alverstoke, when he came to fetch you home; and even my father, who was not prone to remark such things, said a few words, which showed me that he was not blind to it, but you were too much absorbed by other feelings yourself, to betray any towards Mr. Annesley. So much, dear Mabel, in extenuation of my use of the word incongruous, as applied to Mr. Annesley. Every one knows Edith, how incapable she is of appreciating such a man; but Clarence could see nothing but perfection in her, that, I was quite aware of, therefore had my father lived, I would not have suffered the sacrifice to be completed. For all sakes, I would have ventured to grieve him by declaring my insurmountable objection to marry Clarence; but I was spared this painful step by his death. That event at once stopped Edith's haste to marry her guardian, which I believe

was only an act of despair on her part, and I am sure of extreme reluctance on his; and one of my first anxieties was to release Clarence from his engagement to me, though I will do him justice to say that he pleaded most eloquently against my decision, and really, in the height of his self-reproaches for having so often crossed my father's desire to see us married in his lifetime, I think he deceived himself into the belief that he actually wished the engagement to continue; but I knew both his heart and my own better, and did not scruple to tell him, that I wished to obtain my own liberty as much as to restore his. After a time, he yielded to my arguments and those of his own heart, and just before Mr. Annesley went to Canada, it was given out that Edith and Clarence were engaged; I dare say the marriage will not be delayed, longer than is necessary to avoid any appearance of disrespect to the memory of my father. Why indeed should it? Of course there was a great deal that required Mr. Annesley's attention in his character of guardian then, so that he really made a greater sacrifice than you have any idea of, in going out when he did, and for any one but Mabel Willoughby, even for the sake of his little ward herself, I don't think he would have done it."

And how had I repaid this sacrifice? by unkindness and coldness, and the deepest ingratitude! I groaned as the recollection of my conduct rose before me, and how truly I felt that, at least in this instance, a woman's tongue had been her own worst enemy.

"But it will all come right, dear Mabel," Ruth said consolingly, in answer to the confession I made of my reception of his kindness. "Mr. Annesley is now at the Grange, and I don't think he can be so inexorable, as not to give you a chance of rectifying the misunderstanding that has arisen."

I did not know; he was, I was well aware, so extremely sensitive, that my own conduct had been enough to separate us for ever, if he had really at any time given me more than a common share of his interest, and of course, not knowing my suppositions, he would put a very different interpretation on my conduct.

But there were many other subjects to be talked over between Ruth and myself, without making my own folly or feelings the theme of our conversation. I was anxious to know if she meant to reside at Brackenhurst; she said she would be a good deal guided by her aunt's wishes. Her lease of the Knoll expired this summer, and if, instead of renewing it she

would reside with her at Brackenhurst, she would rather live there than let the place. I hinted playfully at the possibility of some other companion displacing her aunt; but the suggestion was met by such a grave and firm denial, that I saw it was no mere coquettish resolve, adopted only to be combatted, but a fixed determination. "What right had she to enter any family," she said, "with such a stain upon her birth?"

Philip returned to Arden Rise the day after I went to the Knoll, and came out to see me. He said he owed his curacy to Mr. Annesley, who, he believed, paid his salary, so that Mr. Haroldson by obliging him, should not be injuring himself or others. He spoke highly of his Rector, as just the man he would have selected, earnest, high-principled and conscientious, carrying out all that my father had begun, and never sparing himself in any way. Such a man as it was a pleasure to work with. "Some day or other too, Mabel, the living will be mine," Philip went on, "for when I had been a few months in the Curacy, Mr. Annesley told my Rector, in my hearing, that he wished him to train me as his successor; so there will always be your old home for you and Amy, and the young ones you see."

I thought he glanced slightly and wistfully at

Ruth as he spoke, while he tried to cover any consciousness of whatever the glance might convey, by a slight laugh. I laughed too, as I thanked him for the provision, though, I added, I would prefer seeing his home otherwise shared; but at the time, I think I scarcely attached any meaning to the glance, I was more occupied with what he had said before.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Then friendship came with purest hope below,
Like dark-stoled Una, with her lamb of snow."

CATHEDRAL.

"I never shall smile more—but all my days
Walk with still footsteps and with humble eyes,
An everlasting hymn within my soul."

WILSON.

"LOOK here, Mabel," was Amy's salutation when I returned to Everleigh Court, as she held out a note to me in Mr. Annesley's hand-writing. "Really I must say that preux chevalier, Mr. Annesley, is a most true friend, I suppose Philip has told you all he has done for him, and now see the offer he makes us."

I took the note she extended, and tried to read it; but whether it was the trembling of my hand which prevented my holding it steady, or that a mist before my eyes intercepted my vision, I can-

not say, not one syllable however of the contents could I distinguish.

"Well," Amy said impatiently, "why don't you speak? what do you say to the proposal?"

"What proposal?" I asked. "The glare of the midday sun out of doors has dazzled me I believe, for I can't see in this dim light."

"Dazed, you should rather say, I think," Amy retorted, snatching the paper from my trembling hand. "Why, can't you see that after making some compliments on our return to England, Mr. Annesley offers the Grange to myself and the children during his absence, supposing I may wish to continue in the neighbourhood? Of course you are included, though your name is not mentioned, and then he adds, that by accepting the proposal I should confer a favour on him, and be doing a kindness besides, to the Grange and Mrs. Wilson."

"His absence?" I interposed, "is he then going away?"

"He is gone," Amy answered. "If you had only listened to the end, you would have heard his apologies for not calling to make the offer in person, which he was unable to do, because he was going down to Portsmouth that same evening, which was a few days ago, in order to go out in some vessel or other to the Crimea. At least,

he does not say that exactly in his note, he merely excuses himself on the plea of pressing business, Mr. Claytoun heard the rest, I don't know where."

"Then it may not be true!" I exclaimed, clasping my hands, "oh, Amy, it may not be true!"

"What is come to the girl?" Amy said scornfully, "why, one would think it was a matter of life and death, and yet it is plain enough that he cares nothing about you, Mabel, you ought to see that. That story of his marriage was all a fiction Helen tells me, but, being clear of one engagement, at all events he shews no desire to enter into another."

"It may be so," I exclaimed with a sigh, "but oh, Amy, I have acted like an ungrateful idiot."

"You don't spare yourself certainly," she said laughing, "but I know nothing about that. What shall we do with regard to this offer? It really seems too good to be refused, for of course the children must put them out a good deal here, large as the house is, and you are fond of the Grange. The bower-rooms would make excellent nurseries, and the library would do for a play-room for the boys, and then you and I could have the drawing-rooms and dining-room to ourselves."

"Don't take me into your calculations, Amy," I said, horrified at the desecration she was meditating. "You say my name was not included in the offer, but whether or not, I certainly would not go to the Grange."

"Where then, Mabel? I thought you were so fond of the gloomy old place, that you would have jumped at the idea of living there."

"Then you are not the first person who has either deceived herself, or been deceived," I replied with bitterness. "As for the 'where?' I have plenty of friends, Ruth Aubrey, Aunt Martha; or even Edith."

"The hare and many friends," sneered Amy, "like poor puss, when necessity came, I fear your friends would vanish."

The words were almost identical with those with which I had so cruelly and undeservedly taunted Mr. Annesley, and the recollection was more than I could bear.

"You may be right, Amy," I said, as the tears rushed into my eyes, "but it is not kind to anticipate such conduct. True; I have turned my back upon one who would have been a real friend to us, but I will not judge so ill of others."

"Then you really mean that you will not accept the offer of the Grange, Mabel?"

"I mean that I have no power of refusing an offer which has not been made to me," I replied; "but under the circumstances, had I been fifty times included, I would not have gone there."

"You are as strange as ever—and as selfish," Amy muttered in an under tone, "for of course if you will not go there, I cannot. It would be impossible for me to live alone anywhere, least of all at the Grange, so I must remain a burden on the family here." And she wiped some tears from her eyes.

I believe I was selfish, or very unfeeling at that time, and the sight of her tears rather hardened me, so I remarked coldly,

"I am sorry to be an obstacle, but I will never take possession of another person's house, unasked; I had rather beg my bread or go into the Union, first."

"You have an independant fortune," Amy went on tauntingly, "and such a fate is not likely to be your's. You can afford to choose your residence, but I am obliged to live on the charity of others." And once more the handkerchief was applied to her eyes.

"Amy," I said, "I am sure you do not wish to be unkind, but your words are fearfully so, and yet I might well claim your forbearance," and flinging

myself down, with my face hidden in her lap, I poured out the sorrow of my heart. I told her of the love which had so gradually and silently grown up in my heart, of the sunbeam and the dew that had fostered and aided its growth, of the shadow that Edith's coming had thrown upon it, of its weak and unhealthy efforts, notwithstanding, to struggle upwards still into light, of the blight of misunderstanding followed by the cruel frost of indifference, which had checked all its sweetness and beauty, turning them into unsightliness and offence—and could she wonder that I should refuse his hospitality, and object to receive help from his pity? I spoke rapidly and passionately, and Amy must have listened in astonishment to a confidence, so unusual from one so much accustomed to bear her sorrows, whatever they might be, in silence. My earnestness, however, subdued at once all her petulance, and quietly raising my head, while she uttered words of endearment, and drawing me on to her bosom, she embraced me tenderly; and then as agitation gradually subsided into calmness, she made me sit beside her, and with her arm encircling me, and my head on her shoulder, she spoke gently and soothingly, and poured sweet words of comfort and of hope into my aching heart. Words which I was too ready to drink in

greedily at the time, though cooler reflection obliged me to put away the refreshing draught far from my thirsty lips.

There was no longer question as to accepting Mr. Annesley's offer of the Grange. Amy now entered warmly into my feelings, and consented to remain for the present at Everleigh Court, and I returned to the Knoll, at Ruth's earnest request, to help her in the consideration, or rather carrying out, of a scheme which she said she had much at heart.

It was the time when Europe was ringing with the horrors which our brave troops were suffering in the Crimea. Horrors then unmatched in the annals of modern warfare, combining as they did pestilence, famine and the sword, and which have only been surpassed by atrocities of a more recent date. The sufferings our troops had undergone already, had aroused the sympathy of all England; not alone those who had to mourn the loss of near relations, but those less personally affected, were burning with eagerness to mitigate, to alleviate, or at least to share their sufferings; money, time, labour, all were considered as nothing, to prove the deep and earnest commiseration with, and ardent admiration of the gallantry of our soldiers and their noble fortitude. Among the many

private individuals who, not content with offerings alone, left their country that they might participate in the hardships, and perhaps in some way, aid the brave fellows in the fearful struggle they were engaged in, was Mr. Annesley; and when Lady Ruth had heard of the still greater devotion, which led delicate and gently nurtured ladies to abandon home and its comforts, in order to give their services to those who, in pain and sickness, were deprived of all that tender solicitude and needful care, the absence of which so terribly increased their miseries, her heart burned to join the number, and dedicate the experience, which many years tending her sick father, had given her of a nurse's duties.

Of course, there were many to dissuade her from adopting such a course; but without being headstrong, there was a quiet firmness in Ruth, which it was not easy to overcome. It was not lightly that she adopted any plan, but once her mind entertained it, and she had viewed it in all its bearings and found it feasible, she went firmly forward, gently bearing down all opposition, until at last her idea was perfected and made practicable. In the present case, she urged her peculiar qualifications, joined to the fact that her very isolation seemed to call her to the post. Perhaps I

was the only person to whom her absence would really occasion a blank, and at first she wished to persuade me to accompany her; but independantly of other considerations, there were substantial drawbacks to my becoming a member of the heroic band. Amy was a powerful one, for she clung to me in spite of her occasional acerbity; Mr. Annesley's being already in the East, was a yet stronger bar to my going thither, and though this was not alluded to, I think Ruth's delicate tact led her intuitively to understand and acquiesce in my feeling, and she ceased to urge my participation in a scheme, which my own loneliness of heart, and sympathy with the sufferers, would otherwise have led me to adopt eagerly.

This then was the plan she was desirous of discussing with me, and at her wish I remained with her, only making occasional visits to Everleigh Court, till the close of the summer saw her set forth to the good work.

Edith Marsh was a guest at the Knoll part of the time, for Ruth was very desirous to convince both Clarence and herself, that the existing state of things met with her perfect concurrence. I, too, was glad of the opportunity of resuming my former relations with the little humming-bird, which recent events had insensibly interrupted.

I think there was more constraint and stiffness in her manner than in mine, for perhaps conscience told her that she had not played a very dignified part, to say the least, either in hurrying into the engagement with Mr. Annesley, or in breaking it off when circumstances changed; and knowing how highly I valued him, she probably thought I should resent her flighty conduct towards him. Such, at least, was what I conjectured from her manner when we met.

If this were so, I soon relieved her apprehensions; what indeed was there to resent? Had she trifled with the feelings or, even in the least, wounded those of my once dear kind friend, it might have been otherwise; but I never believed she had any power to touch them, so I met her as cordially as ever, and returned the embrace, which she half shyly proffered, warmly, when going into her room soon after her arrival, I sat down, as of old, beside her on the sofa, and talked to her easily of the past.

"Then you are not angry with me, dear Mabel," she said clasping her hands, and looking up in her own childish way.

"Angry? no, why should I be angry?"

She did not know, only perhaps she had been wrong about Gardie, she said, as she played with

her ribbons. "I was very unhappy, Mabel," she went on, "I knew I ought not to like Clarence; I did try sometimes to be very stately in my manner to him, but it would not do; and then, when I remembered how happy we used to be, you and I and Gardie together, you know, at the Grange, I fancied if I married *him* it would all come back again."

"And how did you persuade Mr. Annesley to think the same, Edith?" I asked.

"I don't really think he ever did, Mabel, though I tried to believe so; and one day, when he had been scolding me for allowing Clarence to come to Calvers during his absence, I told him I hated Clarence, and was very miserable. You know his way of soothing and coaxing, he was so kind that I really thought he was jealous of Clarence, and I felt at the moment that I loved Gardie better than any one, and thought it would give him such pleasure to know it, and so out it came. But instead of raptures, he gave a start that quite frightened me; and then he walked up and down the room like one frantic, till at last he saw that I was crying, and then he came to my side in his gentle way, and said he had no intention of taking advantage of the position papa had placed him in, and that I must not think that he was angry about Clarence

on his own account, or was trying to prevent my making any other choice; and then he entered into the story of Ruth and Clarence, which of course I knew, and added that I was too young to know my own mind. I believe that aggravated me, as Phœbe says, and so I persisted in what I had said. Then after a time he went abroad.

"He came back at last, having been very ill, and seeming miserably unhappy; I really did believe myself in love with him, and Dame Margaret thought so too, I know; she used to take long walks with him, and then he would come back and be more lover-like in his manner, so at last he yielded, and the day was fixed; then Lord Ottersee died, and I knew, or at least I thought, that now Clarence was at liberty to please himself, he would never marry Ruth; and I got so excited, that it ended in my falling ill again, but this time I had not my kind nurse as when we were together at the Grange, dear Mabel; well, on account of my illness, everything was put off till the spring, and in the meantime it came out that Ruth had refused Clarence. I am sure Gardie knew me better far than I knew myself, and he was always so considerate, trying to make me feel that I was quite free; at last I believe Clarence spoke to him, and just before he went to Canada

it was all settled, though on Ruth's account and her uncle's, it was not made public; all this time I had been so unstable and wavering that I was ashamed to write to you, and now, dearly as I love Gardie, I do feel so grateful to him for his kindness."

I kissed her warmly, for I don't know when I ever felt so really affectionately towards her. "Poor little humming-bird," I said, "what troubles it has had with its plurality of lovers."

She laughed one of her old merry laughs as she replied, "Gardie was no lover, Mabel, I see it now, and I wonder how he bore my tyranny; for I used to worry him to death, when he was at home; and whenever I wanted to tease him, I would ask him to sell the Grange, or let it, and declare I never could live there, which, indeed, I don't think that I ever could have done."

"Well, you have a more roomy cage now," I suggested, musingly.

"Oh yes," she went on, "she was so curious to see Alverstoke, and to hear all about it, Ruth never seemed to like to describe the place or talk of it; and then it would be so charming to live sometimes there, and sometimes at Calvers, and sometimes in London, and Countess of Ottersee was such a pretty title."

"And this child might have been Mr. Annes-

ley's wife!" I thought, and a deep sigh escaped me, as I thought what a sacrifice it would indeed have been. Edith looked up into my face, "How you sigh, Mabel!" she said, "and how pale and thin you are grown; I hardly remarked it before; are you unhappy?"

"Unhappy?" I repeated, with a light laugh, "what should make me so, Edith? I have no plurality of lovers to fret me, only a little hard work; and the black dress, of course, makes me look thinner and paler, Mrs. Mainwaring has made me feel that in various ways, since I have been at the Knoll," I ran on, anxious to give a turn to the humming-bird's thoughts, a thing by no means difficult of accomplishment.

But it was quite true that Mrs. Mainwaring had in no degree lost her art of inflicting small wounds; I had been attacked already on the subject of my black dress—"It was so few people who could hope to look well in such deep mourning, Amy's bright complexion could stand it to be sure, but where people were naturally pale—Mr. Annesley said, Lady Ruth looked a fright in black, with her pale complexion; but I don't think she is quite so pale as you are, Mabel; at least your's is not that delicate waxy tint, but I shall be very glad, my dear, when you can wear white collars. By the

bye, Mabel, poor Mr. Annesley has lost the heiress after all. Is he gone to the wars in despair, dear? oh you pretend not to know, you sly girl! that's right, my dear, keep your own counsel; and now if you will come to Arden House, I will shew you the last dress I had from Paris—all this you know is dreadfully old fashioned, you could not be seen in it beyond Winterford, my dear."

Yes, Mrs. Mainwaring, unlike her fashions, was wholly unchanged, though looking younger even than when I left; still busying herself in the affairs of her neighbours, still trying to exalt herself, or some favourite for the time being, by the depreciation of others, still hanging on to the skirts of nobility; curious as ever in the arrangement of her company toilette, her gloves and her fashions; always in the extreme of the mode; affecting youth and beauty, and exacting homage from old and young, yet withal good-natured, agreeable, and managing to make herself so useful and pleasant, that people sought her in spite of themselves. She was still the cactus with its broad green leaves, apparently smooth and inviting to the touch, but in reality armed with innumerable minute prickles, imperceptible almost, but inflicting the most irritating wounds.

Edith did not remain long at the Knoll, the

Cramptons were at Calvers, and she wanted me to return there with her; but the repose of Ruth's manner suited me better; besides the Knoll itself presented many attractions to me, not the least of which, was that of being in the parish of Arden Rise, which not only admitted me again to all the privileges from which I had been so long debarred, but gave me the opportunity of almost daily intercourse with Philip and our old village friends. The sight of the Beechley woods, indeed, renewed painfully the memory of past days, with all their vanished delights, and sometimes made perfect acquiescence in the present, difficult to attain. Their waving boughs seemed to beckon me to enter, and as we drove past the iron gates, a longing, searching look, used to be sent up that familiar avenue, and fondly but sadly would memory wander among the recollections of pleasures, past away for ever.

Still many remained to me, and I strove not to let the want of the one denied, make me insensible or careless of those I might still enjoy. I tried not to let it be so, but to be grateful and cheerful, and succeeded altogether tolerably well, though the stinging recollection would sometimes intrude, that the happiness I so yearned after might have been mine, that the jewel had been perhaps within my

grasp, and that I had heedlessly suffered it to drop from my hand. I am afraid the long and frequent visits I made to the old fisherman and his wife, were less due to the interest I actually took in themselves, than to the gratification of hearing them talk of Mr. Annesley, his goodness, and thoughtful care for all around him.

But the Knoll must be left. Mrs. Aubrey's lease had expired, and she and Ruth were to make their future home at Brackenhurst, where the latter wished to see her aunt established before she left England, and where I promised occasionally to visit her during Ruth's absence.

I had not, however, taken a final leave of the Knoll; an agreeable surprise was in store for both Amy and myself, when one morning, Mr. Clayton told her he had taken it as a residence for herself and her children, thinking, what was indeed very true, despite their kindness, that she would prefer having a home of her own; so we found ourselves once more inhabitants of our old parish, and the arrival of Aunt Martha soon after, to live with us, seemed to carry us almost back to the happy days of our childhood.

Ruth was to leave for the Crimea early in the autumn, and, as for all sakes it was desirable that she should be present at Edith's marriage, that

event was rather hurried on in consequence. Mr. Annesley was recalled from the East, and of course came to give his ward away; but he did not come down to the Grange, so we saw nothing of him; for it happened that the children were ill of some infantile complaint of which Amy sickened slightly herself, so I was unable to leave home, or at least, it formed a sufficient excuse for my absenting myself from the wedding, which, for reasons of my own I had no wish to attend.

In due time the receipt of wedding cards from the Earl and Countess of Ottersee, née Edith Marsh, informed us that, in her own estimation at least, our little humming-bird was transformed into a bird of paradise. I had thought that perhaps when the wedding was over, Mr. Annesley might take one look at the Grange—but no! he hurried back to the Crimea, and Ruth also took her departure, and so hope subsided into stillness, and I tried to think—content.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,
Though pain and grief may come to-morrow?"

WORDSWORTH.

"Der Herz ist gestorben, die Welt ist leer,
Und weiter gibt sie dem Wunsche nichts mehr.
Du Heilige rufe dein Kind zurück!
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet."

THECKLA'S SONG.

THUS the summer of our return passed away and the winter came, and all things seemed, like the season, to have sunk into a profound stillness. Truly, like the season, for the stillness was only on the surface, not in the heart—it was not death, but sleep—the germ of life remained in the vegetation around us, the stream of the Arden, peopled with its multitude of living things, still struggled onward beneath the mantle of ice which congealed its surface, all waited but the return of the summer sun to burst forth again into beauty and gladness,

nd so with my own heart, its depths, with all the despair and love and sorrow they contained, were but shrouded over with a mantle of stillness, only the warm vivifying beams of hope, were wanting to melt this cold covering and wake it anew into life and joy. Would that sun ever rise again for me? Alas! I feared not.

Meanwhile, Amy was gradually regaining her former spirits, a little subdued perhaps, and in some things improved; Aunt Martha was the same good simple soul as ever, as impervious to the shafts of Mrs. Mainwaring and as open to all kindly impressions.

It was very pleasant to us all, to be thus reunited and so near our old home; for me, indeed, the Grange with all its memories and associations stood like a dark shadow throwing its gloom alike on the past and the present; but though I only saw it as a cloud, to others its brighter side was visible, and both Amy and Aunt Martha often took delight in strolling about the grounds, and wondered that I never joined them in their visits to a place, where of old I had spent so much of my time. Dear indeed it was to me still, with all its mournful memories, and I loved to look upon its dark woods, and wander beside the little river when it escaped from the park; and thus, as it were, to

hold one end of the chain which seemed to connect me still with its distant owner; it enabled me to think sometimes that we were not utterly divided. Amy had a clue to the reason of my avoidance of the Grange, but there was no suspicion of the cause in Aunt Martha's mind, and I had often difficulty in parrying her invitations to accompany her thither, and in laughing off her comments on my altered looks, and her anxiety to persuade me to seek medical advice.

Altered I was no doubt; I could not look in the glass without being conscious that Mrs. Mainwaring's sarcasms were not wholly without truth; indeed to give her her due, there was generally a spark of that virtue underlying most of her observations, which perhaps only made them the more irritating. I was in fact paler than ever, and my figure always slight, was now become thin, almost angular, of which our little workwoman, Jane Elliot, did not fail to make me sensible by her uncomplimentary observations, while in the exercise of her business. Yet it was not that I fretted, I tried to acknowledge the wisdom that had appointed my trial, and to submit in meekness and without repining.

"Time is not eternity," I repeated to myself, "and in a few years, perhaps less—who knows?—

How trifling all that now harrasses and grieves me will appear!" So I struggled on, doing the duties that came to hand, as well as I could, endeavouring to convert whatever there was of bitter in my lot, to its best use, and striving to walk contentedly along the path marked out for me; bare and uninviting though it might seem, it was not wholly cheerless, there were wayside flowers even there, I might plant yet more, and by careful cultivation add to their beauty and perfume; and while weeding and tending and planting the little flower garden at the Knoll, which the gardener allowed me to consider my own, I sought with equal assiduity and earnestness to dress and to keep the garden of my heart.

But it was not possible to repress a sigh as I daily passed those iron gates, once so hospitably open to me, and thought of all the treasures of the library, and pictured to myself that old oriel window with its stone mullions and diamond panes; the velvet-like lawn beyond, bordered by evergreens, and shaded by tall forest trees; the dark oak furniture within, and the ample bookshelves with their precious burdens. As I used to walk musingly onwards towards the Knoll, fancy would transport me to that deep window recess, in company with my favorite authors; I saw, in imagination,

the deepening shades of evening closing down, and noticed the changing lights and shadows thrown by the creepers, and listened to the note of the nightingale and the distant hootings of my friends the owls, scarcely, to my ear, less musical from the associations they awoke; and then would steal upon me, the sound of a quiet, firm step entering from the garden, and as I raised my eyes, a sweet, gentle smile would beam upon my upturned face; and then my companion would seat himself by my side, and point out beauties which had escaped my eye in the book before me, and gather spiritualized meanings, which my earthlier mind had missed, from the words I had been reading; and study became pleasure, and darkness, light, as difficulties vanished before his magic touch, and by degrees I learned to see with his eyes, and hear with his ears, and think his thoughts. Happy, happy hours! the remembrance of which brought bitter tears into my eyes, bitter, because memory alone remained, the reality was gone! Since that last evening that we had sat together there, an interview always fraught with sad and painful recollections to me, we had met but once, alone, on the borders of the Canadian lake, and there I had suffered my ill-disciplined heart to vent its jealousy in reproaches of neglect, and unkindness—

how unmerited! How more than unjust they must have seemed to him, ignorant as he was of what was really irritating me! By those words I had snapt the silver cord of friendship which had hitherto united us. Even the very neighbourhood he avoided now, and he had come to England and left it again without an effort to see me.

Winter was now beginning to yield to the sweet influences of spring, and the country about Arden Rise was gradually bursting into full beauty. The fragrant buds of the horse-chesnuts in the Grange woods, were spreading out their broad fan-like leaves; sweet pale primroses studded the mossy banks of the fields and deep green lanes, with their delicate blossoms; and the woods were carpeted with violets, anemones, and the lovely little woodsorrel, with its mystical leaves of tender green. Soft shadows coursed each other over the smiling landscape, or lay upon the hill side as passing clouds obscured the golden sunshine; the air was filled with the rich fragrance of the pines and larches—life itself was a delight, and the heart swelled with a tumultuous sensation, half of deep melancholy, half of happiness—the happiness that expresses itself in tears. Even the sea owned the influence of the season, and participated in the change, casting off the dull, leaden hue of stormy

winter, and assuming the clear, sparkling, silvery blue of summer, while the white sea birds as they sailed over its surface, looked like pearls sprinkled upon its bosom.

The great Eastern struggle of the nations was over too. Last autumn had seen the fall of Sebastopol, and the sufferings of our troops were drawing to a close. Individuals, not belonging to the army, were returning home, amongst these was Mr. Annesley, and the news had reached us that he was already in England. Nothing, however, was said of his coming to the Grange, and indeed we were told that he had been ill again, and was gone to Ireland, to his sister, Mrs. Crampton.

About a month later, as I was one morning returning from the village and passing the Grange gates, which road, though considerably longer than the path across the fields, I always preferred, for some reason which I never sought satisfactorily to account for, I was struck by an unusual appearance—the large iron gates stood wide open, and as I approached, Mr. Annesley's groom drove out in the direction of Winterford. He touched his hat to me, and at the same time old Mrs. Fenton who still held one of the gates, dropt a curtsey.

"A fine morning, Miss," she said smiling.

"Very, Mrs. Fenton, how is the rheumatism?"

"Going away Miss," she replied, "with the cold winds, many thanks to you for asking; but dear heart Miss, you never come to see us now, I was up at the house only last evening, and Mrs. Wilson was saying she had not set eyes on you inside the Grange, since you come home; my old man's afeard, Miss, as you be offended."

I assured her there was no ground for the apprehension, and made some inquiries into her domestic affairs, which she answered, adding, "but indeed, Miss, my heart's so full of joy at the thought of master's return, that I can't think of anything else."

"The master's return?" I echoed, "is he coming home then?"

"Yes, Miss, John's just gone to Brackenhurst to fetch him, he has been staying there this last week. I hear as Lady Ruth is come home too; but come in and sit down a bit, Miss, you look but poorly; I said to Fenton yesterday, as I saw you go by looking wearied like, I said as you walked too much I thought. Please to come in and rest a minute, Miss, you'll never be able to get on to the Knoll."

"Oh yes, I shall, I hope, thank you Mrs. Fenton," I answered, though in reality I rather

doubted it; but I would have sunk down by the roadside, rather than go in there, "thank you very much, Mrs. Fenton, but I must get home to my sister," I added, as wishing her good morning, I resumed my walk, steadying my trembling limbs as best I could.

I was a long time reaching home, and when at last I got there, Amy was as much alarmed by my looks as good Mrs. Fenton had been.

"What has happened, Mabel?" she asked anxiously, "you look like a ghost, have the cows frightened you?"

"No, Amy, not the cows, only a dog cart," I said with a wretched attempt to laugh, resulting in a burst of hysterical tears.

"What is all this, Mabel?" she demanded rather impatiently. "What folly have you been committing now? Tiring and exhausting yourself in this way, when you are going to dine at Arden House to-day, and you know it is one of Mrs. Mainwaring's monster parties; and by the bye, here is a note from her, requesting you to bring some music."

"Oh, I cannot go, Amy!" I exclaimed.

"Not go, Mabel? but you must. Mrs. Mainwaring reckons upon you this afternoon, she says she has some very musical people coming from

Winterford, and hopes you will not fail her, and will be in good voice."

"I wonder if Mr. Annesley will be there?" I said, speaking to myself more than Amy.

"Mr. Annesley?—Is the girl dreaming; what should make you think that likely?" Amy asked.

I did not know, perhaps I was dreaming, but my mind felt in such a confusion, and my head in such a whirl, that I could hardly tell whether all I had just heard and seen were an actual reality, or merely a sort of dream.

Brackenhurst! why should Mr. Annesley go and stay there, before coming home? Why had he taken such a dislike to the Grange? Was it because I was in the neighbourhood? Innumerable questions passed through my mind, as I sat there leaning on the table before me, with my face hidden in my hands. It was no wonder that Amy was perplexed, and a little cross at my silence and odd behaviour. After a time I sighed out, "It has been a long and hard discipline; will it ever cease, or is my nature still so unsubdued?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, Mabel," Amy remarked. "You are very strange, but if you will take my advice, go and lie down upon your bed for an hour or two, and

Phœbe shall bring you some wine or salvolatile, instead of sitting there muttering about a man who evidently bestows no thought upon you."

The advice was good, though, as too often happens, the mode in which it was given was unpalatable—so I rose to follow it, and then remembering, as I reached the door, that I had given Amy little real clue to my agitation, I said,

"Mr. Annesley is expected at the Grange to-day, Amy. I met the dog-cart going for him; you will, perhaps, understand me now." And before she had time to overwhelm me with either congratulation or condolence, equally unsupportable at the moment, I had left the room.

CHAPTER XX.

"As are our hearts, our ways are one,
And cannot be divided—Strong affection
Contends with all things, and o'ercometh all things.
Will I not live with thee? Will I not cheer thee?
Wouldst thou be lonely then? Wouldst thou be sad?"

JOANNA BAILLIE.

It was no very flattering picture, certainly, that my glass presented as I finished my toilette, preparatory to going to Arden House.

My cheeks were almost as white as the muslin of my high dress, except, perhaps, that they were of a less pure tint, and the slight shade thrown by the scarlet geranium in my hair and waist, was all that redeemed my appearance from being utterly ghost-like.

"And the music, Mabel?" Amy suggested, as I stepped into the carriage.

"All that I shall want to-night is in my head," I said, faintly attempting a smile. "Good night,

Amy, I envy you your *tête-à-tête* evening with Aunt Martha."

There was a very large party assembled in the drawing-rooms at Arden House when I arrived. I saw Mrs. Mainwaring run her eye over my dress and face as she welcomed me, and felt that it was not an approving glance, so without looking round on the rest of the company, I gladly subsided into an inner room, where the two Miss Claytouns and a few others were seated.

"You know that Mrs. Aubrey and Lady Ruth are here this afternoon." Helen Claytoun observed, after we had talked about other things for some time.

"No!" I exclaimed, springing up to rush to her, as Helen pointed to where she sate, and then reseating myself, as a glance into the other room showed her surrounded by strangers.

"Mrs. Mainwaring is doing her best to make her a lion," Helen went on, "but it is difficult, cold and impassible as she is."

"The last person willingly to accept notoriety," I said; "indeed she is too simple and straightforward to see anything to excite attention, in the heroic step she has lately taken."

"She looks very charming to-night," Miss Claytoun remarked. "There is a sort of ineffable

expression of happiness in her face, almost seraphic."

"Well, there may be reasons for that," Helen observed, with an expressive smile; but just at that moment, and before there was time for further remark, my attention was arrested by the sound of Mr. Annesley's name, as the servant announced it at the door.

I don't think I either started or stirred, it came upon me as something for which I was prepared, and I merely drew back a little closer, while the conversation went on around me as before. I saw him then, for the first time since that cold good-bye in Canada. Yes, that was his bodily presence, on which my eyes rested;—there was a slight, very slight trace of illness in his appearance, just a shade of languor, nothing more; but there was the same sweet smile as he shook hands with Mrs. Mainwaring, and received her compliments, for I could see by the affectation and agitation of her manner and person, that she was paying compliments; the same easy, careless way of submitting to them, as it were, just giving them their proper value and no more. And now she has turned away for a moment, and his eyes wander round the room in search of some one, then all at once they fall on Lady Ruth who is

looking towards him, and he gives a little pleased start, and is by her side in an instant; and she puts out her hand with a smile of unusual animation, and he drops into the place she makes for him beside her, and then the group that had been round her, gradually disperses, and I sit there, heedless of all else, and watch their earnest conversation, while daggers seem to be piercing my own heart.

The dinner movement aroused me from my trance. I noticed him give his arm to Ruth as she stood up, and then as the crowd swept by me, I heard Mrs. Mainwaring's voice from time to time, marshalling her guests, and was conscious that a coated arm was proffered for my acceptance, and that by its help I walked into the dining-room and took my place at the table, and on looking up, I found to my relief that I was on the same side with Ruth and Mr. Annesley, and at the opposite end.

I don't suppose that my conversation was highly edifying, but I know that I talked and even laughed, and ate, and went through all the requisite proprieties of the table in a satisfactory manner; and that after a time I found myself in the drawing-room again, not having dared to raise my eyes as we passed along the file of

gentlemen that we left behind us. I felt jealous of anybody's engrossing Ruth again, so, after receiving her pleasant surprised and glad recognition in the hall, I drew her into the little room where I had sat before dinner, and we enjoyed a long conversation. The gentlemen came in before it was ended, and parties were formed for music, or games of various kinds, or conversation, according to their tastes.

Several ladies played and sung, more or less well, and in time Mrs. Mainwaring came to claim my services. I felt now that the moment of my triumph was come, and all apprehension forsook me as I sat down to the piano, and threw a glance round the room to see where Mr. Annesley was. He was standing at the farther end, by the fireplace, in earnest conversation with a knot of gentlemen, his back being towards the piano.

I preluded for a minute, and then struck off into an air of Beethoven's. I thought the conversation flagged at the other end of the room, and that Mr. Annesley ceased to take part in it, as the old familiar notes fell upon his ear; but he did not turn, he only leaned his elbow on the chimney-piece and listened. From Beethoven I glided into Mozart, and thence almost imperceptibly into the symphony of one of Schubert's

most passionately pathetic songs; I gave it with all the fervour and depth of pathos my voice was capable of, and the spell worked; I saw Mr. Annesley look up from his listening attitude, I dared not meet his eye, but I knew that he made a step forward eagerly, and then sunk back again into his former posture.

My song was ended, and I rose from the piano; I was conscious of a buzz of applause, and entreaties for more, but my power was exhausted, and I could only smile, and shake my head in reply, and just then the welcome entrance of a servant to announce some of the carriages, and mine among the number, released me from further importunity.

Mrs. Mainwaring rustled up with a profusion of thanks to her dear Mabel, and assurances of the wonderful admiration my performance had excited in this and that great person present. How little I cared for their praises! how utterly indifferent I was to the effect produced on all but one in the room, poor Mrs. Mainwaring could have little conception of. I took leave of Ruth with a promise to come to Brackenhurst soon, and then I turned to leave the apartment. At the door, an arm was offered to me, I took it mechanically, and as we crossed the hall I said with a calmness that astonished myself,

"It was an unexpected pleasure to meet such a stranger as Mr. Annesley to-night."

"Was it a pleasure, Mabel?" was the softly spoken, yet eager answering question.

"It is a pleasure to find that the Grange is not quite abandoned," I replied, "and no doubt there will be many who will rejoice at the return of its master; though I suppose you will not remain there long."

"That depends upon circumstances," he rejoined, gravely; "you are living at the Knoll now, I hear?"

"Amy is, and I am staying there just now," I said, with an air as if I would have added, *that* need not keep you away from the Grange. I don't know whether he understood my meaning, probably he did, for he was a wizard in reading thoughts, but he merely said, with a quiet smile, as he put me into the carriage,

"I suppose I may call on *Amy*, may I not, Mabel?" I bowed as the servant closed the door, and then throwing myself back, I covered my face and shed tears of mingled anger, and jealousy, and self-reproach.

My feelings, indeed, were curiously mixed. I could have thrown myself at his feet, confessed my fault, and implored his forgiveness like a child;

while at the same time I took delight in irritating and annoying him. I think Mrs. Mainwaring must have infected me with some of her cactus-like propensities. I could not put out of my head the meeting that I had seen with Ruth; for one so undemonstrative, she had shewn such unusual pleasure, and his had quite equalled hers. Yet it hurt me to be jealous of Ruth, and I lay all night, restless in mind and body, anxious to prove to Mr. Annesley that he had no power over me, yet feeling his power unbounded; and tormented with the consciousness that it was utterly beyond my art to deceive him.

I rose with the dawn; I tried to employ myself, not mentally but bodily, yet I could do nothing but wander in a purposeless manner through the shrubbery, and gaze upon the Grange woods in the distance. The breakfast hour came, and Amy bantered me on the dissipation of the previous evening, which, she said, she supposed had prevented my usual morning walk. She and Aunt Martha were curious to know the events of the evening, and who was there, and I had to describe with all the particularity I could.

"And Mr. Annesley was really there?" Amy said, "and has been staying at Brackenhurst, has he? and Ruth was there too?"

"That would be a very prudent match, my dear," Aunt Martha remarked; "much more sensible than marrying Edith, he would get Brackenhurst back again, and Lady Ruth would have some one to take care of her, poor dear."

"I don't think Mr. Annesley wishes for Brackenhurst, auntie," I said; "I have heard him often declare that he prefers the Grange to any other place."

"It does not seem much like it," Amy remarked sneeringly, "since he never comes to it."

It was a hateful conversation to me, so I rose from the table.

"I am going to take a long walk to-day, Amy," I said, "so don't expect me home to luncheon, I mean to go to the sands, there has been a ground swell these many days past, and it is so calm and still now, that there will be treasures inestimable to be found there."

"But suppose Mr. Annesley should call here to-day," Amy suggested.

"Most probably he will," I replied, "but that would make no difference in my plans."

It was a lovely, balmy April morning, the air full of sweet sounds, and redolent of delicious scents. Soft fleecy clouds chased each other over

the sky, and the sun shone with a veiled lustre upon the earth. I varied my usual route to-day, and instead of passing the Grange gates, took the shorter path across the fields, which soon brought me to the Griffith's cottage, where I made myself welcome by the tidings of Mr. Annesley's return. Then I strolled along the sands, now and then stopping to pick up, or examine something that lay in my path, and occasionally standing still to gaze out seawards, and watch the gently rippling waves as they sparkled in the sunbeams, or the sott cloud-shadows as they passed over, forming as it were little islands of bright chrysophrase. I think my naturalist's ardour had sensibly abated, for though it really was a day to delight a collector, I took no heed of the opportunity;

> "For my heart was hot and restless,
> And my life was full of care.
> And the burden laid upon me,
> Seemed greater than I could bear."

For a time I seated myself below the Smuggler's Steps, and recalled the hours of terror I had passed there years ago—centuries ago almost, as it seemed. I tried to think, I wanted to collect my thoughts, to look into my heart, to overcome this strange feeling that had possession of me. But thought never yet came at a call, and my utmost

endeavours to fix mine were fruitless; they would only float away vaguely over the past, like the shadows of the clouds over the waters, and would take no tangible form. I abandoned the attempt in despair, and wandering on, sat down on a rock near the sea, with my empty basket beside me, and my eyes gazing out over the waves in aimless rumination.

Presently my attention was recalled; there was a step behind me; a step that had always power to make my heart quiver—it was hardly audible on the soft sand; I believe I felt, more than heard it. I did not look round, but I listened till my heart, that had beat so violently as I first became aware of its approach, almost stood still with the intensity of my attention.

The silence was but momentary, and Mr. Annesley threw himself on the sand beside me, saying with one of his gentle smiles, as he touched my basket,

"The morning's search has not been a very successful one as far as you are concerned, Mabel, I have been more fortunate."

"I am glad to hear it," I replied, with an effort, and affecting to understand his words literally. "May I see what you have found?"

"I made use of a wrong expression after all,"

he replied, "for I have only just reached the ground I wish to search."

"Then we are both in the same plight," I answered laughing, "you can boast of no more than I can."

"True," he said gravely, and a pause of some minutes ensued. Then with an entire change of subject he began again.

"Why have you so completely forsaken the Grange, Mabel? Is it become distasteful to you?"

"We are still in the same condition," I replied again laughing, though it was now rather forced. "Why have you forsaken it, Mr. Annesley?"

"Because the spirit that made it a paradise to me once, haunts it no longer, and it is become a place of torment," he said very gravely, as he drew figures on the sand with his stick.

The spirit of perverseness once again gained the ascendancy, and I answered:

"I am sorry; I did not think you would have missed Edith so very much."

"Nor do you think so now, Mabel," he observed with seriousness; "you are wilfully misunderstanding me; you know that Edith was but a child, that she had no power to please or grieve me beyond that of a child; you know, or might have

known that that engagement, far from being sought, was contrary to my wishes; that my heart was otherwise occupied."

I was not subdued yet, the rebellious feeling was strong within me. I would not yield, so I said with affected indifference.

"If I was mistaken in the object when you spoke of the Grange being deserted, it was because I was not aware that Lady Ruth Aubrey had ever been there."

He was silent for a few minutes, and then he said: "And you really believe the words you have spoken Mabel? you believe that I have been your companion for years, that I have watched the growth and opening of that sweet mind and heart; that I have inhaled the odour of the rose, and can turn to pluck a bramble—by comparison. Mabel," he went on in a lower tone, "did you believe this last night, when you sung that song? Did you not know the power you had over me?"

I was silent in my turn. What could I say? I covered my face with my hands, and my tears fell fast, while I hardly breathed. He went on.

"There has been misunderstanding enough between us, Mabel. You were right perhaps to resent my engagement to Edith, for you did not

know that it was a promise unwillingly wrung from me by her father before his death—unwillingly, for even then, child as you were, I loved you. I meant to have told you all in Canada, but you would not listen; you taunted me with unkindness, with neglect of you when you were in trouble, with insincerity towards your father, with faithlessness towards yourself—you gave me no opportunity to explain; you turned disdainfully from me. I was cut to the heart, more by your manner than your words, for I thought you had learned to despise and hate me; we parted coldly, and I thought you felt so. I have shunned and tried to banish you from my heart, but in vain, it is too wholly yours—will you discard it, Mabel?"

I struggled to speak calmly, but I could not control my voice, at last I said hoarsely, without removing my hands,

"When I saw you in Canada, I believed that Edith was your wife; what could I think, or do?"

"And now that you know the truth Mabel?" he said pleadingly.

I reached out my hands without speaking, he took them between both his own, and pressed them to his heart, to his lips.

"And they are mine then, Mabel, are they?

and you forgive past misunderstanding, apparent neglect, dearest?"

"I have heard all fully explained," I replied.

"Then why did you speak of Lady Ruth, dearest Mabel?"

"Why do you ask me?" I said turning suddenly towards him, "you who have read my thoughts so clearly from infancy—I saw your meeting last evening, I heard you had been staying at Brackenhurst, things were said of you—"

"Which in your heart you did not believe, beloved one," he said gently, "or why did you sing that song?"

"There!" I exclaimed, "are you not a wizard?"

"And yet I have not always read aright," he said smiling; "perhaps because the matter has been too serious. I have been too anxious, too fearful, too hopeless sometimes, in spite of bright glimpses that have now and then, at rare intervals, penetrated the clouds, and shot bright glimpses of hope into my heart. But now, Mabel, surely we need fear no further misunderstanding, you will let a life of devotion atone for a few months of apparent—not real neglect?"

"You have found then what you were in search of?" I said, smiling through my tears.

"I have found the treasure I have been seeking through all these long years," he said, "and will guard it henceforward, in the warmest corner of my heart. And you, Mabel?"

"My basket is empty," I said, looking into it as I spoke; "and yet I told Amy that I should bring home inestimable treasures; she will look for something more tangible I fear."

I spoke lightly, to conceal the depth of my feelings if it were possible, for I feared to shew how my whole heart was filled, and trembling with happiness, and I dared not acknowledge that the treasure I had found was to me indeed above price. I rose as I spoke, and he rose too.

"We will at least work together," he said, taking my hand again and drawing it within his arm, as he bent down and imprinted a kiss on my lips.

I think, however, the work was nominal, and my basket as empty at the end of our walk as when he found me. We strolled home slowly, and the time was occupied in explanations of past mistakes, in plans for the future, in enjoyment of the present.

"But now it has fallen from me,
It is buried in the sea,
And only the sorrow of others,
Throws its shadow over me."

The Grange was not forsaken again; before the glories of autumn had well begun to light up the rich foliage of summer with their crimson and golden tints, I had resumed permanently my favourite seat in the Oriel window, and the dear friend and guide, whose approach had, in former days, so often made my heart quiver and bound with a wild delight, had become the familiar companion and beloved husband.

Years have passed over us now, and as I cast my eyes upon the sorrows and troubles, and hopes and anxieties recorded in these pages, I feel like the mariner, who after battling long with the waves and storms of ocean, drops his anchor, and furls his sails at last in peace and security, in the haven where he would be.

Yes, we are indeed one in heart as in name. Together we still read and study, together our pleasures are enjoyed, together our duties are performed; we share each other's joys and lighten each other's sorrows, for where is the web of life here below,

bright though it be, that is utterly uncrossed by the dark thread of sorrow?

Other joys and hopes are growing around us, bringing still new, and dearer duties, binding us yet closer together as we walk onward into the vale of years; united in heart and in hope here, looking forward to a yet more perfect union hereafter.

THE END.

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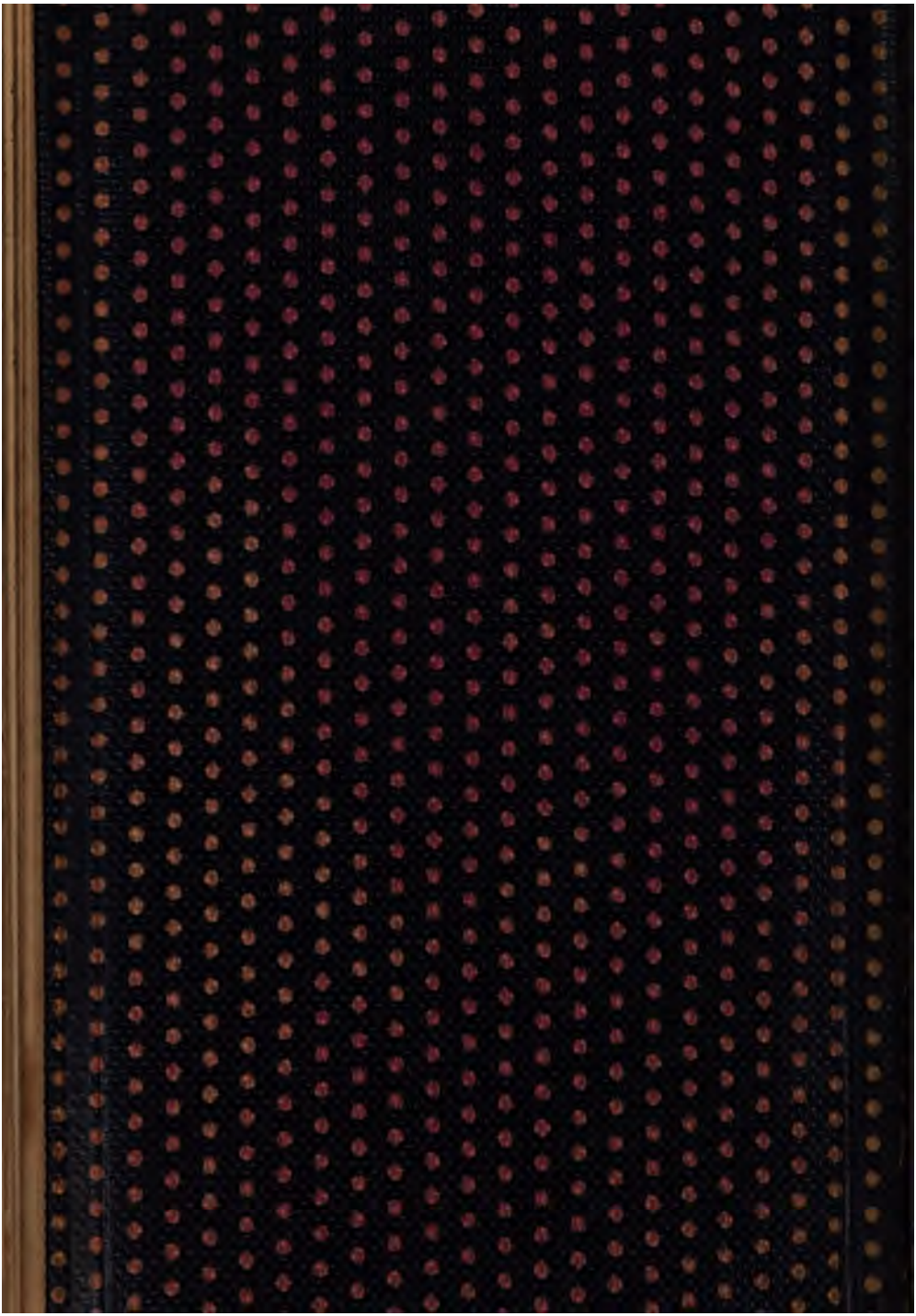
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